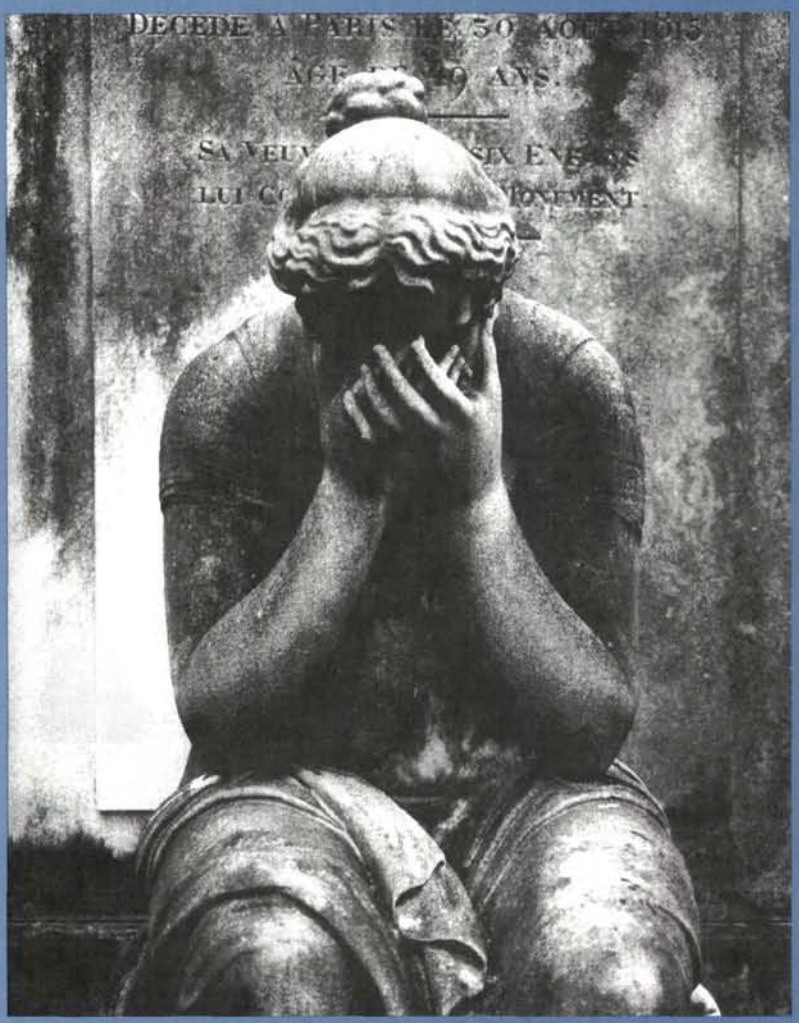
COMMONWEAL

$2.25 March 22, 1996

THE DEATH OF A FRIEND

Alane Salierno Mason



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To the Editors

Punchy pix

Plaudits to whoever is responsible for selecting and placing the cartoons that appear in *Commonweal*. At their best, they resemble *The Pick of Punch*.

THOMAS J. BEARY
Burlington, Vt.

From the editors: The identity of our cartoon curator is classified information, but (hint) her name appears in fourth place on the masthead.

If the shoe fits...

It goes without saying that those who have been through the Catholic-college drill of yore know what "condign merit" is. Now, if Richard McCormick will tell us what "condign penance" is [Correspondence, February 23], and if not he, then Joseph Komonchak, since he is so willing to accept "condign penance" for but half-reading *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, then those of us who have not "hit the box" since the 1960s will know whether or not to chance a return.

PAUL D. VINCENT
Rockport, Mass.

From the editors: We have a condign penance for Mr. Vincent. He is to look at page 306 of the *American Heritage Dictionary*, Second College Edition, where he will learn, without benefit of clergy, that "condign" means "deserved; adequate," as in "condign censure." Also, five Hail Marys.

Welcome ■ *Commonweal* extends a special welcome to the hundreds of new readers who are starting their subscriptions with this issue. We apologize to those who may have been waiting anxiously for their subscriptions to start. Inclement winter weather caused scheduling delays at our fulfillment house and affected the start of new orders. Thank you for your patience, and welcome aboard.

Poland: who did what

It was with real amazement that I read the report you published ["Is Poland Going Communist?" December 15, 1995] on the political situation in Poland following the presidential elections. I am saddened that this account was published in so prestigious a Catholic journal, since the article demonstrates that its two authors—who are probably very young—do not understand what happened in Poland.

"To a remarkable extent," they write, "it was the Communists who gave Poland its freedom, not Solidarity." On the contrary: Under pressure from Solidarity and democratic opposition, facing economic catastrophe, the Communists were forced to capitulate. The "Round Table" negotiations led to the collapse and self-dissolution of the Communist party.

Your authors say that most party members, including Aleksander Kwasniewski, were Roman Catholics. It is true that many party members were Catholics (given that 95 percent of Poles are Catholics), but it is not true of Kwasniewski and the party leadership, even if they were baptized as children.

To say that Solidarity received funds from Mossad and the KGB is simply false. Your writers say that Solidarity was more Marxist than the government. Marxism was dead in Poland long before the collapse of the Communist party; Solidarity's longing for independence and democracy, for social justice and respect for human rights, was simply Christian, not Marxist.

It is true that Mr. Kwasniewski won the presidential election last November, and that today in Poland the two "post-Communist" formations are in power, but your authors do not seem to understand why it happened that way.

JERZY TUROWICZ
Kraków, Poland

The writer is editor-in-chief of the Catholic weekly Tygodnik Powszechny.

The authors reply:

Oh, to be just young again, let alone *very* young.

Despite his vehemence, it does not appear to us that Mr. Turowicz disagrees with the major substance of our article, though we differ on interpretation. Let it be clear, first, that we have no love of hardline Communists. Alina's parents spent years in a Soviet prison. In 1985 we hired blacklisted Solidarity technicians for a movie we shot in Poland.

Mr. Turowicz says it is untrue that Solidarity received funds from Mossad and the KGB; he does not question that the CIA gave help. Solidarity's funding has been thoroughly documented in the Polish press. We refer American readers to *Victory*, by Peter Schweizer (Grove/Atlantic). Such diverse funding represents the panopticum of Solidarity's original strength as a political movement, reflecting its leaders' remarkable ability to persuade so many of the big guns in the cold war to support it.

Marxism was a major tool of the intellectual founders of Solidarity, headed by Jacek Kurón and KOR, which shielded dissident critics who invoked Marxist principles in their call for government reform. In the struggle for power in the late '70s within Polish government circles, both the Soviet clique and the pro-Western faction dubbed themselves Marxist. Stripped of its perverse Soviet mutations, Marxism does not automatically exclude the concepts of social justice, democracy, and human rights.

We agree that Polish communism was a bureaucracy-laden dying dog of a system. Poland's newly elected president, Aleksander Kwasniewski, made much the same point in Party circles as he and others on the government side of the "Round Table" brought that system to a crashing halt in the late '80s—peacefully. On the point of Kwasniewski's legitimacy as a Cath-

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COMMONWEAL

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olic: Until he publicly renounces his faith, that is an issue between him and God. ROBERT FLEET AND ALINA SZPAK

It wasn't government

Whether or not one agrees or sympathizes with John C. Gebhardt, the subject of affirmative action is not well served by his article ["The Real Birth of Affirmative Action," February 9]. Gebhardt suggests that he benefited from the "affirmative action" of allegedly government-approved racial segregation in post-World War II housing, on the premise that the Levittown where he purchased a home in 1952 enforced restrictive covenants that effectively excluded nonwhites.

That simply is not true. Restrictive covenants were burdens on real estate, similar to zoning and easements, which limited the rights of a purchaser in the use and eventual resale of the land. Many areas had covenants forbidding the owner to convey the land to a non-Caucasian.

While these covenants remained in effect, they most assuredly resulted in segregrated communities. The problem with Mr. Gebhardt's version is that enforcement of restrictive covenants ended several years prior to his purchase. On May 3, 1948, the Supreme Court ruled unananimously (*Shelley* v. *Kramer*) that any attempt to enforce a restrictive covenant involved state action in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment and was thus unconstitutional. As a practical matter, then, there was no such covenant in effect in Levittown in 1952, even though it may have continued to appear on title commitments, extracts, and policies. Thus, the segregation that existed in Levittown and many other communities cannot be blamed on any government- or court-enforced covenants, or attributed to some faceless right-wing conspiracy; it existed by reason of the silent will and tacit approval of the residents.

We looked the other way, Mr. Gebhardt, and we were happy that our property values were not compromised. We did not petititon for an end to the practice, we did not boycott the banks that red-lined, and we surely did not tell our neighbors that we really wanted to sell to a black family, did we? No, we took our profit and ran to a secure condo, remaining one step ahead of the problem.

If its promise is ever to be realized, affirmative action needs understanding of the original intent, actual accomplishments, and remaining agenda. Delusional scapegoating dilutes the energies of those who would, if well-informed, contribute to a realistic program and a better future.

W. A. BRODERICK
Willowbrook, Ill.

The author replies:

I thank Mr. Broderick for pointing out what I had not been aware of: the 1948 Supreme Court decision barring enforcement of restrictive covenants by governmental agencies. That same decision, however, made clear that private, nongovernmental parties (such as the Levitt organization) still had the right to include racially discriminatory provisions in their sales policies and documents.

My best guess is that most young buyers in the 1950s, not having read the fine print in their deeds, were unaware of the Levitt policy. It is hard to hold them responsible for it. Much later, after New York had made discrimination in home sales illegal, some of us in the Levitt area organized to visit black organizations in Queens, trying to persuade renters there to buy houses in Levittown. For many and complex reasons, we were not very successful.

One comment by Mr. Broderick startled me. Nowhere in my article did I suggest the existence of a "faceless right-wing conspiracy." My point was rather that for years racism permeated all areas of American society—that whites like me benefited from a kind of "affirmative action," and that therefore as a matter of simple fairness we should support efforts to right the balance. JOHN C. GEBHARDT

Who gets the shaft?

As the result of a class assignment at the University of Notre Dame, I read John C. Gebhardt's article on the benefits conferred on white people by a form of affirmative action. It reminded me of a meeting in our dormitory concerning cultural diversity. Since almost all the participants were white males, it was perhaps not surprising that the discussion shifted quickly from ethnic awareness to affirmative action and "reverse discrimination." The students complained that affirmative action was being used to fill quotas and that as a result people like themselves were "getting the shaft." Rather than easing racial tensions, the discussion probably increased them.

The families of many in that roomfull of students are among the most affluent in the nation; the students are attending one of the country's most respected universities. What's to complain about?

From talking with minority students, it's clear to me that many come from backgrounds that in the usual course of things would not grant them the kinds of opportunities that have come to me because of the town I come from and the schools I've attended. To achieve their potential, these students need a little extra assistance. It's my view that affirmative action only helps those who need it, rather than hindering those who don't. MICHAEL KIERNAN
Notre Dame, Ind.

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Correction Lawrence S. Cunningham's religion booknotes [February 23, 1996] misidentified the publisher of Paul Mommaers and Jan Van Bragt's *Mysticism: Buddhism and Christian*. The publisher is Crossroad.

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Court-assisted suicide

There is "a constitutionally recognized 'right to die.'" So ruled the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit on March 6 in *Care in Dying* v. *Washington*. The opinion, breathtaking in the expansiveness of its claims and the tendentiousness of its argument, might just as well have found a constitutional right to kill. The decision, written by Judge Stephen Reinhardt, upholds a lower court's ruling that a Washington law prohibiting physician-assisted suicide was unconstitutional because it violated the Fourteenth Amendment's due process clause as developed in abortion decisions from *Roe* v. *Wade* to *Planned Parenthood* v. *Casey*. Now, Judge Reinhardt writes that "a competent, terminally ill adult, having lived nearly the full measure of his life, has a strong liberty interest in choosing a dignified and humane death." This liberty interest includes the right to kill oneself with the assistance of physicians, pharmacists, medical-care workers, friends, or family members.

If Judge Reinhardt's argument stands on appeal to the Supreme Court, the decision will be as flagrant an example of judicial legislating as *Roe*. In a matter over which there are deep-seated, indeed fundamental, disagreements, the court has taken upon itself the authority to legislate for the nine states in its jurisdiction; not only that, but, as with abortion, it finds a right not previously discerned in the Constitution while cavalierly dismissing long-standing moral, legal, medical, and religious opposition to suicide as well as opposition to the involvement of physicians or others in facilitating it. The court collapses all distinctions among refusing medical treatment, allowing to die, and its newly found right to assistance in dying. It dismisses any difference between ordinary and extraordinary care; declares the line between acts of commission and omission "a distinction without a difference"; and rejects the argument of "double effect" as having no "constitutional or ethical purposes" (the argument of double effect is invoked, for example, in the use of morphine to control pain in doses that can also depress the respiratory system, which may hasten the death of a dying person).

No doubt, advances in health care and medical technology can create dilemmas at the end of life about appropriate care for the dying. But the nuances of these ethical and medical distinctions represent a steady, thoughtful effort by physicians, ethicists, and legal scholars to respect the dignity and wishes of a dying person *while maintaining a barrier against direct killing*.

Where will this all lead? The court argues that the social consequences of its decision are minimal. Evidence from the Netherlands that physician-assisted suicide for the competent and consenting dying patient has led to the killing of nonconsenting and incompetent persons is waved away. So too, the claim that predictable social pressures on the old, infirm, disabled will end with the direct killing of those deemed unworthy to live.

In his conclusion, Judge Reinhardt expresses the pious "hope that whatever debate may accompany the future exploration of the issues we have touched on today will be conducted in an objective, rational, and constructive manner that will increase, not diminish, respect for the Constitution." With the example set by this court, how could it be otherwise?

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ABIGAIL McCARTHY

DIGGING FOR OUR ROOTS

The deepest aren't ethnic

Several years after *the* war (World War II), I was in Germany. Although I had good German friends, I felt very much alone. It was the era when one of the most popular songs in Germany was "Ami, Go Home" and the Germans in general seemed stiff and of a piece. So when I ventured forth one morning and saw this man approaching me from the opposite direction, I felt a sense of identification and companionship. He was so obviously American—the way his hat was planted on his head, the way his overcoat flapped a bit, the way he wore his horn-rimmed glasses. I, too, must have looked American to him. We both smiled broadly and said "hello" as we passed. It made no difference that he was black.

That moment came back to me the other night when I saw *New Republic* contributing editor Stanley Crouch talking with David Gergen on PBS's "NewsHour" about his elegantly written new book of essays, *The All-American Skin Game* (Pantheon). Among other things, he said in essence that the effort of many African-American scholars to identify with Africans is something of a delusion. An American can don a cap and wear a Kente cloth and go to Africa, Crouch said, but he will on arrival immediately be identified as American. Crouch, an African-American, is always concerned with the meanings of American democracy and how race plays out in it. He confronts the tribalism of minority politics and Afrocentrism and offers jazz as a metaphor in maintaining democratic morale in an industrial world.

Readers with long memories may remember that our common American identity is a recurring theme of mine. I first wrote about it in *Commonweal* in 1975 in response to the then current emphasis on nationality called "the new ethnicity." It was, I wrote, a search for roots and, in puzzling over it, I invoked some well-known writers on race and identity, chief among them Simone Weil, who said, "To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul." T.S. Eliot wrote of Weil that she was a philosopher whose social and political thought had reached a remarkable maturity, but she wrestled with tremendous problems. "She was three things in the highest degree: French, Jewish, and Christian."

Weil was herself a living example of how complicated our roots can be, and she held that rootedness was difficult to define.

> A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active, and natural participation in the life of a community, which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and *certain particular expectations for the future. This participation is a natural one, in the sense that it is automatically brought about by place, conditions of birth, profession, and social surroundings*....Every human being needs to have multiple roots. It is necessary for him to draw well-nigh the whole of his moral, intellectual, and spiritual life by way of the environment of which he forms a natural part." [Italics mine.]

Rootedness depends on an attitude toward the future as well as an affirmation of the past. And only the *living* past is worth recovering. These are her criteria for evaluating our own search for roots on which to base our unity.

Weil did not think of national origin as the first source of roots. The nation is a recent historical phenomenon and each people is the result of successive waves of conquest. The French were once Bretons, Normans, Burgundians, Provençals, people of separate cultures and tongues. The English language is compounded of Saxon and Norman words, reflecting conquest—*swine* in the sty and *pork* on the table, *deer* in the forest and *venison* at the feast—as well as a Latinate legal vocabulary and mystery-evoking words of Celtic origins, thus a testimony to the multiple sources of the people we call English.

For most white Americans today outside of certain urban enclaves, ethnic identification is a matter of choice, for ethnicity has a way of suddenly melting away. I can't help but revert again to my own history. I have always thought of myself as Irish-American, as did my parents, and proudly so. But my children are part German; I have blood cousins of Swedish, French (and probably American Indian), Hawaiian, English, Polish, and Italian background; my children have cousins of Egyptian, black, and Russian-Jewish ancestry. I cannot be anything but moderate or marginal in my ethnicity without denying or denigrating people with whom I share a physical heritage. This is true of millions of Americans.

Diversity implies a certain strength in a society; it makes for an interesting, multifaceted people and for creative tension among them. But how can we find our common roots, that natural participation in the life of a community of Americans "which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations for the future"? What are our particular treasures of the past and our particular expectations for the future? Concepts of work and time and combined effort formed in the past are built into the self so subtly that we are hardly aware of them. So, too, is our sense of space and the possibility of physical mobility—the fruit of our geography.

Even our angers and our discontents have their source in common values—what Seymour Martin Lipset called the key American values—equality and achievement. We take these values for granted. Our institutions have been shaped by them. De Tocqueville noted that Americans as Americans are encouraged to press for their objectives, not

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to accept their lot or hope for remedy from an established upper class.

But are these values—especially the hope for equality and achievement—realistic expectations for our children and our children's children in the future? These are the expectations being threatened in the growing split between rich and poor, and by the malaise and anxiety and helplessness felt by those affected by globalization and the shrinking job market—those who resonate now to Pat Buchanan's call to corporations to change their ways, however wrong he is about everything else.

We must fall back on the values de Tocqueville noted—that Americans must press for their objectives, not accept their lot. It is time that we insist in the words of the new catechism "that those responsible for business enterprises are responsible to society for the economic and ecological effects of their operations. They have an obligation to consider the good of persons and not only the increase of profits." We are in this together—Americans all. □

OF SEVERAL MINDS

DAVID R. CARLIN, JR.

INCLUDING VOTERS OUT

The Dems do it better than Buchanan

The conventional judgment about Pat Buchanan's speech at the 1992 Republican National Convention goes something like this: It was angry, negative, divisive, and full of hate-mongering; it gave the GOP a terrible image of intolerance; and it may well have cost George Bush the election.

That year's Democratic Convention, by contrast, was a love feast. It abounded in prochoice and progay placards, which drove home the point that the United States is a tolerant and freedom-loving country. You do your thing, I'll do mine, we'll tolerate one another, and we'll live happily ever after. Three cheers for Bill Clinton and the spirit of upper-middle-class liberalism!

And if there happen to be any dissenters at the convention (like Bob Casey, that pain-in-the-ass governor of Pennsylvania), we'll simply ignore them; better still, we'll silence them. We'll make sure that Casey doesn't get a chance to address the convention. And who cares if he's the governor of the fifth largest state, a career politician with impeccable Democratic credentials. We're tolerant people. But there are some things even the most tolerant will not tolerate. Casey is one of these things, Buchanan another. Pity those poor Republicans in Houston. If they had silenced Buchanan the way we silenced Casey, Bush might have had a chance.

I remember at the time finding it odd that the mainstream press generally agreed that the Democratic Convention—which silenced all dissenters—was a model of tolerance while the Republican Convention—which permitted speeches not only from Buchanan but also from the prochoice governor of Massachusetts—was a model of intolerance. The odd thing about this was not that the press would collectively misrepresent matters; they do that commonly. What was odd was that they would misrepresent events we had all seen with our own eyes. Weren't they afraid the masses might notice they were being lied to?

At the time I wrote an article that appeared in *Commonweal* (August 14, 1992)—and in a shortened version on the op-ed page of the *New York Times* (August 10, 1992)—in which I said that the treatment given to Casey at the convention was a way of saying to all prolife Democrats, "Get out! We don't want you in the party!"

I added that this was not simply a philosophical division on the merits of abortion. It was a class division as well. The social base of the prochoice movement is the upper-middle class. Believers in the prochoice religion are privileged people: good educations, good jobs, good incomes, good homes, good cars, good dogs, good boutiques in the neighborhood, good everything. They have their reward. Prolife people, by contrast, are blue collar and lower-middle class, the great unwashed and semi-washed. Viewed from the point of view of the typical prochoice snob, they are unspeakably vulgar. Their income level and class culture are deplorable enough, but their antichoice position puts them absolutely beyond the pale.

No wonder the choice-dominated Democratic party said to these people, "Get out! We don't want you!" Unfortunately for the Democrats, these vulgar masses, these "middle Americans," have traditionally supplied the bulk of Democratic votes. To throw them out of the party is tantamount to partisan self-destruction, an act of what may be called "particide." Yet since many liberal Democrats are great believers in the right to suicide (another "choice" issue), I suppose it is fitting that they should try their favorite remedy on their own party.

And now look at what has happened. Look at the masses accepting the invitation to leave. Look at them stream out of the Democratic party. And where are they going? Well, for the time being at least, to Pat Buchanan.

For a generation these people have been treated like dirt by the leadership of the party. Their values have been insulted, their economic interests ignored. For Americans below the upper-middle class, the national quality of life has deteriorated badly in the last thirty years. Their incomes have stagnated or fallen; their jobs have become insecure; their marriages have failed; their children have grown up in a world rife with violence, drugs, premature sex, out-of-wedlock births, and poor public schools. And what remedies are proposed for America's ills by the moral idiots of privileged-class liberalism? Such pertinent solutions as taxpayer-funded abortions, condoms in schools, gay marriage,

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and euthanasia. Who can blame the plebeians for seceding from a Democratic party that welcomes such ideologues into its leadership ranks?

Buchanan has found the perfect formula for leading them out of the party. (It isn't, however, a formula for leading them into the GOP, though it may be a formula for creating a new party.) When he speaks about a "culture war" or "religious war" he makes himself attractive to these unhappy Democrats. And when he denounces Wall Street and the transnational corporations, he makes himself more attractive still, for at the bottom of the old-fashioned Democratic soul is a distrust of the rich. Ironically, the lifelong Republican Buchanan, probably because of his Irish-Catholic background, understands that Democratic soul far better than privileged Democratic liberals do.

Cromwell said to the Rump Parliament: "You have sat too long here for any good you have been doing. Depart, I say, and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go!" Too bad the Democrats don't say this to the progay, proabortion, prosuicide, prosecularism element of the party. Anyway, it's probably too late now.

I don't know what Pat Buchanan's future might be, but the future of the Democratic party looks exceedingly bleak. Alas, it was once a great party, and there were those of us who loved it. □

Patrick Jordan

O JERUSALEM

A journalist becomes a pilgrim

I went up to Jerusalem in January as a journalist, but quickly became a pilgrim. I write "up" because the psalms refer to the city that way. Once there, more than 2,300 feet above the Mediterranean and even further above the Dead Sea, you realize just how precise the psalms are.

I stayed at a hospice off Nablus Road near the famed École Biblique. This in turn was only two blocks from Jerusalem's Old City, the ancient walled capital that is now an island encircled by modern East and West Jerusalem. Before the 1967 War, the area had been partitioned between Jordan and Israel.

I found myself drawn to the Old City each morning for the liturgy. Early mornings and late evenings are the best time to be there if you wish to pray at the holy places. Later in the day the numbers of visitors can be crushing, the sound of camera shutters as incessant as August cicadas.

I would set out with the sun coming up over the Mount of Olives, just east of the Old City. The light would gradually creep into the Kedron Valley, skip over the top of Absalom's Tomb, then splash against the white stone walls of the Temple Mount, turning them golden. It was during those fresh morning walks that I realized why Jesus, even when pursued by the authorities, couldn't resist going up to the city. He wept over it, and would today: Jerusalem the holy, riven by ongoing explosions and divisions—personal, tribal, religious, political.

In the January air, tracing the circumference of the Old City walls, approaching the El-Aqsa Mosque, walking the Via Dolorosa, or donning a paper yarmulke to pray at the Wailing Wall, this trip became more than a trip. No wonder the pope wants to go to Jerusalem to mark the millennium: Jerusalem puts everything in perspective.

For me, a Latin-Rite Catholic, seeing Rome for the first time from the East meant observing Catholicism from the vantage point of the mother church of Christianity, and doing it in the company of ancient sister churches—Orthodox, Coptic, Armenian, Syrian, Ethiopian, Latin Rite Palestinian—the living churches of the Holy Land. Suddenly the words catholic and *oikumene* had a deeper resonance. Yes, the bishop of Rome ought to be allowed to visit Jerusalem; he ought to linger there: getting to know its hills, its light, the air that makes you breathe differently. He should experience ordinary, everyday life: the Palestinian women arriving from Bethlehem before daybreak, carrying huge burlap sacks of freshly grown herbs and vegetables on their heads; Jewish families streaming through the Jewish Quarter to the Wailing Wall; Arab men in the courtyard of the Haram el-Sharif, washing their feet in preparation for prayer; the aroma, narrow walkways, and frenzied bustle of the Souk on the first night of Ramadan, with fathers vying to buy steaming piles of freshly made flat-bread to carry home to their waiting families.

The pilgrim's memory I am bound to carry to the grave is of an early morning Eucharist at the Holy Sepulchre. I was up before dawn, brushing my teeth, when the electricity went out in East Jerusalem. Total darkness for miles. Hurriedly finishing dressing, I made my way into the void, descending through the grand Damascus Gate into the Old City. Although I had visited the Church of the Holy Sepulchre before, I had never been forced to find it in the dark. At points, the narrow streets of the Old City become tunnels. When that happened, all I could do was take one hesitant step at a time, the passageways swirling in blackness, my inner maps totally dissolved. Occasionally, I would cross the path of a stranger and nearly feeze in fear. Finally, in the distance, I saw a faint outline, the minaret of the El-Omariyeh Mosque, and I knew I was home: For the mosque stands adjacent to the Holy Sepulchre. The holy place of another faith had led me to that of my own.

The basilica of the Holy Sepulchre dates back to Constantine. It remained in darkness that morning, except for the occasional flicker of a candle and the small flames of hanging, oil-lit lamps. The actual sepulchre is a small, highly ornamented mausoleum, situated beneath the dome of the larger church. This shrine is under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox, but at specified hours the other rites celebrate their liturgies there.

Peering into the archway of the sepulchre, I saw a white-

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clad Abyssinian monk praying in the small antechamber to the tomb. He wore a white cap and bright red woolen mittens and stockings; his breath heaved grey clouds into the cold morning air. Facing the tomb, he rocked up and down on a prayer rug, his head bowing to the floor. I entered the antechamber, then ducked down and entered the tomb itself. Roughly three people can kneel there at one time. An old woman was there, praying beneath a beautiful icon of the Madonna. Next to her and above a slab in the crypt—*the* slab—was a second icon of the Risen Lord, encased in elaborate silver plate. Initially, I didn't like it. It wasn't della Francesca's monumental Christ stepping out of the tomb. But I soon came to realize that it was the most beautiful representation of the Resurrection I had ever seen. It seemed to capture the utter novelty of a man rising from the dead, both the gaunt realism and the mystery of it. Praying there, I also became conscious of a gentle fragrance, a mixture of the oil from the lamps, the incense of centuries, and a small bouquet of fresh flowers on the altar above the slab, beneath the icon.

Yet it was not the extraordinary beauty of the place—its Eastern sense—that created a feeling of both tranquillity and exaltation in me. It was the presence I felt of those living witnesses of Christ's life I have known. Some were just met in Jerusalem, others were dead. But there were the many others living: those who care for the poor and the dying in New York, a priest on Rikers Island, a woman who works with victims of AIDS, another who has given her life to peacemaking, and yet another who works with refugees in Sudan. There were my family, fellow workers, and members of our parish. It is through them I know the living Christ. It was they who had prepared me for *this* place.

I backed out of the crypt, shaken. The Abyssinian monk was still in the antechamber. Now he was prostrate on the ground, his whole body rolling gently back and forth in prayer. I had seen Jews rocking at the Wailing Wall and Muslims bowing in worship outside the Dome of the Rock, but I hadn't yet seen Christians in Jerusalem in such expressive prayer. Perhaps I had been prepared by these others, but I did not find the monk's manner off-putting or foreign. Rather, it seemed graceful, fitting.

The week I spent in Jerusalem allowed me to hear Mass in six different languages. But that particular morning the Mass was sung in Latin. The great organ accompanied the Franciscans' voices and filled the cupola. We sang Gregorian *Missa IX* and—a minor miracle—I remembered not only the music but the Latin responses, and even understood some of the readings—David in Jerusalem; the cost of discipleship. The celebrant's breath billowed as he chanted, like the incense rising from the censer of the young Palestinian server beside him. And there was a connecting thread in it all: the tomb, the ancient language, the proclamation of the good news, the future in the young boy.

The lights came back on. Jerusalem began another day. □

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Ralph Filicchia

A BUCHANANITE SPEAKS

Tired of Republican promises

I am a middle-class, blue-collar worker with one wife and three children (one in college). Since I first started voting in 1960 I have always voted Republican.

The Republican party seemed the more anti-Communist of the two major parties. Since I considered communism a major threat of our time, it was only natural to support the party that addressed this threat in meaningful terms. Ronald Reagan met the threat head-on and I consider his presidency instrumental in the final defeat of the Soviet menace.

But that was then—this is now. The Communist threat no longer exists, and I am now free to look at other aspects of national leadership. To be honest, what I see I don't like.

First, the Democratic party. For all its incessant chatter about the poor and the average working man, the Democrats still hit me as the party of assorted crazies who seem interested in wrecking the America I knew as a boy. You can laugh all you want about Ozzie & Harriet, but the fifties were great times in our country, and we could only gain by going back to the values and common sense that ruled America at that time.

I don't see the Democratic party doing that. Instead I see a president who, once in office, makes a federal case about allowing homosexuals into the military. This is not an issue on the front burner of the average working man's life. The Democratic party is more interested in promoting social change than it is in promoting the common good. But the average American working person is not going to be helped by a political party that wastes its time with these irrelevancies. That is not the Democratic party my father voted for when he supported FDR and Harry Truman.

The Republican party has retained its allegiance to common-sense traditional values. I don't hear wild ideas coming from that corner telling me that what was once anathema, like homosexuality, is now something we should promote. I don't hear Republicans trying to outlaw God from the national debate. In short, I don't fear their social and cultural positions, and I realize they express them from a defensive position. But—I have other problems.

All my life I have heard the canard that the Republicans are for the rich people and the Democrats are for the poor working man. Needless to say this always came from Democrats. I never placed too much faith in it, and being neither rich nor poor, figured it wouldn't affect me one way or the other. I didn't know any rich people, nor did I know anyone who was really poor in the true sense of the word. I was the consummate middle-class American.

But lately I have begun to wonder if maybe there isn't a bit of truth to the charge. I still agree with the social and cultural ideas of the Republican party, but at the same time I

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see a squeezing of the middle class that I had not previously noticed. And I'm beginning to wonder if the policies of the Republican party haven't contributed to this squeeze.

I read Kevin Phillips's *The Politics of Rich and Poor* (Harper Perennial, 1991) and it indicated why some of this might be happening, something for which I could not blame the Democrats. I read Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele's *America, Who Really Pays the Taxes* (Simon & Schuster, 1994) and this infuriated me. A lot of people were getting away with murder and I was paying for it. Some of them were doing it with the help of Republican policies that have created loopholes and tax shelters that enable certain individuals and corporations to pay less tax, sometimes no tax at all, thereby shifting their fair share of the tax burden to everyone else. The rich were getting richer but people like me were suddenly faced with the prospect of layoffs, paycuts, part-time jobs with no benefits, manufacturers moving overseas, and politicians who seemed more worried about Wall Street than Main Street. In fact, it seemed the more Wall Street prospered the worse it was for middle America. That told me that something was wrong.

I am not an economist, nor do I understand the arcane world of high finance. I own no stocks, nor do I have a fancy retirement fund that will someday pay me big bucks. But I do know that the American dream is getting to be just that, a dream and nothing more. And this is not because of something the people did, but what those in high places did.

I have tried to analyze this and have come to the following conclusions: It has been said by the Republican party that government is not the solution, but the problem. But that is not necessarily true. There is a "theology" to both government and economics that the Republicans have failed to consider. We believe in the checks and balances of government, and we believe that absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Should it not then follow that the absolute power of corporate America also corrupts absolutely? The rising tide that supposedly lifts all boats could also enable the big boats to maneuver better so they can sink or capture the smaller boats. Who says that big businessmen are more noble or holy than big politicians? Those who control the market are no more noble than those who control the government. So then, why does the Republican party constantly praise one to the exclusion of the other? If the government needs checks and balances to keep it from running wild, why shouldn't the rich and powerful corporations have similar checks and balances to keep them from running wild to the detriment of the poor and middle class?

I have come to believe that my present problems as a blue-collar worker derived from policies that have been designed to benefit the rich and powerful. Take the recent rise in interest rates that supposedly took place to stop the threat of inflation—even when there was no inflation to be seen. That cost me some money when I had to use credit. It also made a lot of money for people in large financial institutions. I was suckered on that one. And who cares about a flat tax? Steve Forbes is for a flat tax of 17 percent for everyone. Right now he pays 39 percent, so it's great for him; but it's not going to do much, if anything, for me. So why should I get myself in a lather about this latest gimmick? The same can be said about capital gains taxes and all the rest. I'm not rich and I will not appreciably benefit from them. The Republican party that I have long supported is no longer talking to me.

Should I then consider voting Democratic? No way! I have had enough of the politics of guilt and pity. Their Compassion Card has been played once too often, and I am now finding compassion (and no longer patriotism) to be the last refuge of a scoundrel.

But can I stay with the Republican party? I was beginning to doubt it, then came the New Hampshire primary and Pat Buchanan. Here at last was someone who was talking to me. He was not the usual political wind-up doll spewing out "political plastic talk," sounding good and saying nothing. He spoke like a man who knows what it's all about—and also cares. But he might not last long enough for me to favor him with a presidential vote. Powerful forces are already circling his candidacy, trying to end it whatever way they can. But I doubt if these "forces" are worrying about me as much as they are worrying about themselves.

I might be left with Republicans who are more interested in using me. They will offer me a clean America where there is prayer in the schools, no sex education in kindergarten, safe streets, the execution of mad axe murderers, and an old-fashioned understanding of good vs. evil. But while I am rejoicing in this they quietly and unobtrusively decimate my financial stratum, making my economic position more precarious while at the same time doing what they can—which seems to be at my expense—to make life more financially rewarding for those who are already well off.

I might need another alternative. The most commonsense statement I have heard on this issue so far was spoken by Senator Bill Bradley (D) of New Jersey when he announced he would not seek another term. He said:

> We live in a time when, on a basic level, politics is broken. In growing numbers people have lost faith in the political process and don't see how it can help their threatened economic circumstances. The political debate has settled into two familiar ruts. The Republicans are infatuated with the "magic" of the private sector and reflexively criticize government as the enemy of freedom, and the Democrats distrust the market, preach government as the answer to our problems, and prefer the bureaucrat they know to the consumer they can't control. Neither party speaks to the people where they live their lives.

To this I say, Amen!

Now I must wait for the action to work its way out. Buchanan at the head of the Republican ticket will make a third party unnecessary. But if he's not there I just might need that third party. Millions of people like me should not be forced out of the political process. □

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THE RECONCILIATION OF UNBELIEF

For 'P'

Alane Salierno Mason

There are only a few AIDS narratives. As there are only a few ways of talking about those who die young of other causes. Children become angels, older people have lived "good" or at least "full" lives. When people in their twenties, thirties, and forties die, their children represent both the tragedy of the loss and a hope that not all is lost. But if they are childless? If they died of AIDS?

There are the traditional religious dramas of salvation or damnation; secular modern ones, tragically or gaily wrought, of immortality in art. For those who died too young to know what might have become of their creations, who had not enough time to realize their enormous talents in forms the rest of us can hold, there is the narrative in which death tells a tale of the loss of potential—and, enragingly, tells it over and over again. It is a story outrageously true, and defiantly, untrue. Like the others it is not a story my friend, a storyteller, would have wanted his death to tell.

Last night I again met him in my dreams. He was sitting on the steps of a church, wearing a thin shirt and shivering a bit in the cold. I chastised him for not wearing a jacket; I was still so conscious of the danger of his getting sick. Then we went inside the church, and held each other tightly in the back corner for a long time. I could feel his whole body, living and warm, against mine, the pressure of my arms around him and his around me, the tops of our thighs meeting. It was an embrace that was a completed and completely physical expression of love, an embodiment of it, physical but not sexual, and in it was resolved the entire thirteen-year history of our friendship.

Then he was in Jerusalem with me, the earthly, not the heavenly city, and for a moment I was preoccupied, as I have been in dreams before, by the difference between authentic and inauthentic relics.

When we were both in college, in North Carolina, the campus was flooded with evangelists who would interrupt your solitary reveries on a step or a wall or a path to ask, "Have you been saved?" A fellow freshman told me that as a Catholic, I would go to hell for worshiping the Virgin Mary. Another student asked me, "Don't you want to be sure that if you were to walk out onto that highway and be hit by a car right now, you would be going to heaven? That's what it means to be saved." I said no, not really, I did not want to be sure. I said I believed that doubt was part of faith and uncertainty part of hope; that I felt in me a faith I wanted to share, just by living, with my friends, most of whom for all I knew were agnostics or atheists. She said, maybe you need to get different friends.

He was elusive then. He reminded me of a deer running in the woods. He lived more dangerously than I. Away from our dorm we saw each other only intermittently, passing an afternoon sittting on a wall in the sun discussing books and classes, or listening to a lunchtime Bach concert in the Episcopal church. We cooked in the tiny dorm kitchen no one ever seemed to use; pan-tossed angel hair pasta with vegetables, egg pastina with butter (from my childhood), cheese grits and pork chops (from his), extravagant omelets (he showed me how they puffed up more if you cooked them with a lid on the pan). He taught me how to make sourdough biscuits; we rolled them on my desk and cut them with a glass. From the beginning I considered him one of my best friends. When he heard this during our freshman year he was surprised; he said I had not yet risked anything with him. It was the first time anyone had suggested to me that friendship had to do with risk and not security. Later, I would try to tell him everything I thought, to risk all in words, and often failed, especially at the end.

He retained a privacy that was no longer an elusiveness, no longer hiding from himself and others, just a staking out of a territory that was his own.

For a while after he moved to a new city and began to explore not just gay sex but a gay life, and since we both worked at jobs that did not pay us enough to travel, we did not see each other very often. When we began to spend time together again, we talked about our uncertainties and frustrations over boyfriends and work; but we also talked about belief and doubt, about the cynicism of intellectuals. The dryness of the world we had seen and of which we could so easily become a part. He scorned superficial pieties, but he was afraid of becoming cynical. He did not want to give up the capacity to believe, the richness and beauty of the Catholic church in which he too had been raised, his spiritual life, his responsibility to what he would choose to call his soul.

We began to go to church together when I was in town. He would not take Communion, so as not to be a hypocrite, as I suppose I was. He respected the rules of the church that allowed him few options, that would have preferred he marry only part of himself to a woman like me, rather than live all in the life to which his heart and body led him. Once at Mass with another friend standing between us, I glanced over, tears

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in my eyes from some romantic grief, to see that he was crying too.

I told him that my friendship with him had taught me how to love. He said, "What do you mean?" He was not one to pretend he understood you when he didn't or wasn't sure. He wanted to know more, always, to hear with a roundness. I said, our being able to accept distances and disagreements and even irritation, having confidence, certainty, that this friendship has its own life. That it can be fed by the other changes in our lives. That it will last over an otherwise unpredictable lifetime. He agreed, this time understanding me completely.

He imagined us in our middle and old age, riding bicycles around a college campus, impassioned professors, with enough time to think and read and talk and teach and write. He wrote, it is true, beautifully, sometimes fiercely, coldly, abstractly, deliriously, heatedly, in painstaking particular detail. He never published a word. In college he had been the professor's fair-haired boy. The complete set of Faulkner, each volume of which he had read twice, imposed, in their lurid paperback covers, a certain obligation on his bookshelves, a requirement. Existence as exhortation. As memory and therefore narrative. He told magnificent stories about his panhandle hometown, the woman next door who taught him piano, and the one who came to the screen door to listen to him play, the old priest, the boy he loved secretly who later worked on an oil rig and died suddenly in a wreck. About his family, his three brothers. About himself, the youngest, who saw and felt all and reinvented it with the lushness we know to be the evergreen lifesap of art. The talented one, full of the arrogance and self-hatred of his difference. Enthralled and repelled by his own sensitivity, and his lusts.

Early in his illness he dreamed that the bag in which he carried his books for graduate school was covered in blood. His writing mentor wanted him to write a book, a journal of his illness. But when he was sick, he could not write, and when he was well, he wanted just to live, to be alive, to celebrate hunger and its satisfaction. The tedium of sickness tormented him even more than the pain, the lethargy it induced, the necessity of preoccupation with medications and reactions and each new symptom. The unsolvable geometry of it became a recurrent figure of his nightmares. There was the home IV kit, the ritual of flushing arteries with saline before and after the antibiotic drip, the night-fevered heat in his ears that would not let him sleep. The fear of losing all his senses, his ability to smell gone and hearing and taste diminished by chronic sinus infections. The test for Mycobacterium Avium Complex that involved driving a special needle into the knob of his hipbone, giving him new insight into the crucifixion; imagine, he said, "they nailed his hands, feet, and hipbone to the cross." The mysterious gut infection that brought a pain that made suicide understandable, a pain that filled his entire consciousness, leaving no room for anything but pain. In talking of this he told me of trying to imagine his death, and in the telling I felt he had made it beautiful. "What do you mean?" he asked quietly. I tried to say that the essential beauty of his way of describing things, and the importance to me of his telling, transfigured them. I could not say, though I felt it, that our conversation itself was a sacrament.

The additional burden of leaving a written legacy was one he both did, and did not, need. He had just left his job to work full-time on his master's thesis when he died, the final infection with its attendant septicemia taking him in a day.

When I asked him a couple of months before if he had ever thought of publishing his journals he almost spat, no. Who would be interested? he said, which I took to mean he would let us decide, after his death, whether anyone was. He loathed sloppiness, self-indulgence when it came to serious work, so he avoided taking his most important work seriously. At his famous friend's insistence he wrote a piece for his magazine, a special issue on AIDS, but the piece never ran. To be honest, it was not right. What was outrageous and brilliant and defiant in a letter to the friend became tame and opaque and self-conscious in the imagined context of a prestigious mainstream magazine. He was not satisfied with it. The problem, he said, was how to find a voice, a form, that could exist in a public space. His art was relentlessly private, journals and letters written with incandescent intensity to an audience of one, or no one; homemade cards, sketches, collages, scatter-paintings, woodblock prints, found-art reliefs and oils, piano sonatas and jazz improvisations, home-cooked meals, snacks of pickled okra and sandwiches of pimento cheese. He invented hilarious anecdotes about his trips to the store, recounted overheard snatches of conversation with relish. After his death, his partner talked about how much time they had spent together "doing nothing special," how good that was. When I visited he made the best coffee, with cream; sometimes he brought it to me in bed, and sat on the foot of the bed, talking me awake for an hour or two. Sometimes we walked around the neighborhood, sat by the fountain, went into a bookstore; once we each got a pair of shoes repaired.

When he was sick, he could not write, and when he was well he wanted just to live, to be alive, to celebrate hunger and its satisfaction.

He loved yard sales and flea markets, the castaways of other lives furnishing his own: the sheets, the dishes and cookware, the coffee maker, books, religious artifacts (a plaster Joseph, or is it Anthony? with a rusted chain halo, and Mary, gracing either end of the living room window, which looked over the city in an apartment where several times a day you'd hear a chorus of church bells ringing), the couch and chairs and little marble-topped end table. He had his

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own yard sales, returning the no-longer-wanted materials of his own life to the reincarnating cycles of secondhand commerce. The profits would go to buy himself and his friends a good dinner.

Perhaps among his papers there is a masterpiece not yet seen or recognized; perhaps we will be able to put a book together from his journals and letters, to which this may serve as introduction; perhaps his famous friend, in a book on friendship, will immortalize him.

Contain him. This jumping out at us from books he read and music he loved and food he relished, things he made us buy, coming to us in our dreams to wrestle us out of sleep into a lake of cold water (as he tried to do to me, mischievously, when he had only been a couple of months dead) or in others' memories of him, alive and rolling naked in a pile of leaves in the park, orchestrating a seduction to "The Girl from Ipanema," getting young women to pose topless for his sketchbook when he was still only twelve ("I could always tell he was different," his mother said, "he could draw a perfect basket of Easter eggs when he was three years old") — what kind of immortality is that?

In the myth-making stories we told in the days after he left us, carving the grooves in our memories that might hold him, the images began to conflict, or if not to contradict, at least to separate from each other, like the planes in the Picasso print that once hung in his kitchen. (Or was it the living room? Didn't he hang an extra yard-sale frame tilted before it and a doll or a wig or record album cover or some other piece of junk to give it a third dimension?) Or like the sentences in the Gertrude Stein novel he once cut to pieces to make the papier-mâché face of a mannequin called "Ida," the figure of the book's protagonist, whom he photographed in her mannish brown suit in different locations around his neighborhood. Ida, a perfect mockery of artistic creation, striding in all her brilliant inauthenticity up the public steps of city buildings, briefcase in hand, her face composed of the deconstructed lines of Gertrude Stein still as evocative as before. The photographs of her are quite beautiful.

In our high-rise college dorm there was another public space that was never used, a ground floor "common room" with a grand piano, which he made his own. Sometimes at night the whole lobby would be vibrating; he was playing Rachmaninoff, with no one else there.

I do not think he believed in the immortality of art, though he devoured it, honored it, yearned for it. But maybe he did believe in it, and regretted the lack of time to make "a lasting contribution." Maybe he simultaneously believed and did not believe. It is possible he believed that art was no more immortal than the shape of him in the clothes his mother so wanted to bring home with her after he died. Than the taste of her melt-in-the-mouth Yorkshire puddings. The sperm, even, that carried the virus. Perhaps his body itself lives longer than art, in the molecules of him now diffused through the Gulf of Mexico.

In any case there was little division in him between matter and spirit.

His last two years, after he knew he was sick, his innermost circle of friends were all Catholic. Observant and nonobservant, atheist, agnostic and devout, gay, lesbian, and hetero, fornicators all. His hometown priest, singing Broadway showtunes after the scattering of the ashes, saw his mother each week in steadfast prayer to Mary, and thought of her strength as that of the Virgin Mother herself. After he died I would think of the quality of his attentiveness as an aspect of the personality of Christ. Of unlimited conversations with him in eternity as the only conception I could have of heaven. At his deathbed we all prayed, and all partook of the Communion of his last rites. The love of him filled the room. His big toe was turning white as his heart slowly stopped beating— I saw when his brother lifted a corner of the sheet. "Push on out from shore," one of his brothers said, "you're going to a better place"; "you're going to be with God," his most devout gay friend said. Where is that? I thought, what does it mean, to go to be with God? His gay doctor, who had turned the monitor away so that only he had to see it, told us finally that his heart had stopped.

Either he was rolling naked in the leaves somewhere else, and would do so eternally (but without repetition), or he would never do so again. It is difficult to know, isn't it, what we are meant to understand by "the resurrection of the body"?

When we all jumped in the water after pouring his ashes off the boat (not scattering, pouring, clouding the water like milk. "Heavy, isn't it?" his father had said of the black nylon bag, full of his "remains"), the thickness of the water on my tongue shocked me, and for a moment I thought I was tasting his ashes. The heavy taste of the salt water like blood. His father's pale face where he drifted alone among the white carnations we had thrown, already swept by the current away from the boat, toward the Gulf.

He had trouble imagining it, he had said, his death. When he tried to contemplate an end to his own existence he was simply mystified by it. He could not understand it. He imagined the grief of his family and friends and was saddened, but when he thought of himself, of his own death, it was not unpleasant. Nor pleasant. When he was a child and couldn't sleep, he used to imagine his mother's womb before sperm and egg had met to form him, then his parents before they met and were married, and each of his parents in their mothers' wombs, and their parents before they were married, in their mothers' wombs, and his grandparents' parents before they met, unraveling the thread of his own existence until he fell asleep. His imagination of his death, he said, was something like that. His death.

He was physically beautiful, and remained so even in death, pale hair dusting strong freckled forearms.

He believed in God, and did not believe, and awaited the reconciliation of his unbelief.

He was afraid of dying.

There was little division in him between matter and spirit. □

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Patricia Barone

The Glorified Body

I.

"Though I'm old and sick," said Uncle Ned,
postincision, half his stomach gone,
"in God's eye, I'm just a baby."
He looks forward to his new body, his
second coming together—
successful, not like this
dying from the inside out,
ending in the rotten sweet
smell of cancer, antimatter
on the tibia, fibula, the lovely
long bones' sockets cradle
short bones and become
just tent poles for the trying
flesh: it multiplies
beyond itself, beyond
the adult's blue temples,
open-boned skull of the baby,
scalp drawn tight like a drum,
    pulse beating;
the liquid eye,
held by membrane, so thin.

An old man's death is far below
frontiers—where pain is peaked
so high it might reverse,
as nerves are numbed, then sing:
the newborn's head pressing on
    the pelvic bone, then out!
"A bloody show," they said, and then
    "it's crowning!"
There's something to show
for childbirth, but what of this
straining of the body out
    beyond the body?
Only an observer could
think of pain as a tunnel.
    Does a tumor flower?
Can the dying learn to love their death?

II.

The curve of cheek into jaw,
eyes gravely set among
small orbital bones—
    all reassemble
that last day we hope.
Will our souls, like yeast,
    fall on dough
to multiply, a ferment,
and this time—
no kneading, no bearing down?
Put a finger in the dough,
it leaves a mark,
but the rising fills it in.
    When we rise,
will our fingers from past lives
leave shining prints,
or will the new body erase
memory: all our flesh-fine meetings?
Here we meet, our skin on skin, but then—
    in the glorified body
will we penetrate or linger
in the crossing of colored lights:
never dark or lonely
    in that white light
where colors leech and edges too—
we lose ourselves in God, become one body.

It's enough to make you sick
    of ecstasy, nostalgic
for the birth-marked
body which must be fed.

III.

"Have you anything here to eat?"
Jesus came from death to ask for breakfast.
The disciples, mouths gaping,
followed his every bite—
broiled fish and raw honey.
"Feel me and see—a spirit doesn't have
flesh and bones like mine!"

What sort of body is this!
Not a ventriloquist's
dummy for the soul, oh no—
his body is his voice,
music every cell,
but his hands are as solid as
the bread with its honeycombed holes.
    He is impossible, he is
a wave, a particle, his hands
feed the fire, turn the fish.
He hurtles through space
while he is still
here with us. We're slow.
    We used to think
if we knew where we were
we'd never know for sure
how fast we're going.

Even the glorified
body is not what we think.

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ONE GOD
And other revelations

Frans Jozef van Beeck

The Bible does not support the view that God is God in the same way at all times.
Karl Barth

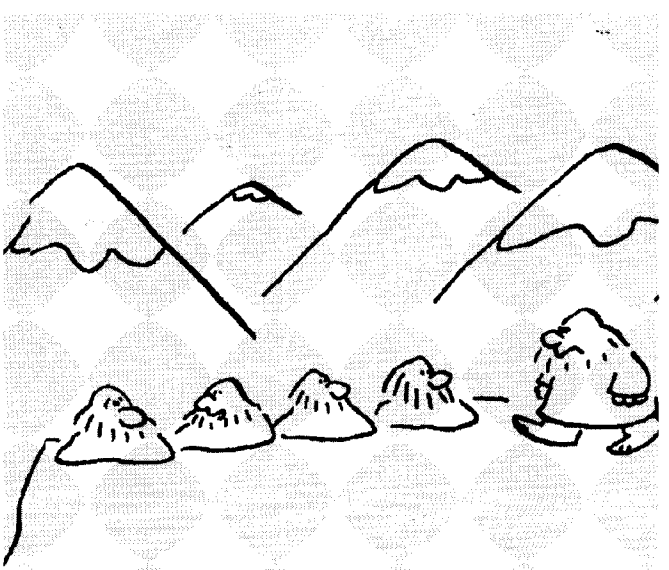
Monotheism. One survey after another confirms that most people in the United States believe in God; most of them attend "the church of their choice" often enough to count as churchgoers. The United States has more houses of worship per capita than any other country in the world, and close to 70 percent of the population prays, regularly or irregularly, as Andrew Greeley has shown.

Factoids like these regularly make the headlines. But why? If belief in God is established so widely, why treat it as news? With believers in the majority, wouldn't one expect monotheism to be treated like any other majority phenomenon: as a matter of course and a generally credible idea? Yet believers typically feel that this common belief in God is not what it could or should be. Is it easier to believe in God than to believe that others believe in God? If God is such a sure thing, why do most of us become irresolute (or blandly tolerant) when asked what difference our belief in God makes? Avery Dulles reports that not until he was a Harvard undergraduate did he realize that if God existed, that was "the most important thing in the world." How many of us ever make this discovery, never mind acting on it? The wag who joked that Unitarians believe "in at most one God" could have cast the net a lot wider. Isn't it odd that our belief in God is as lackluster as it is widespread? Thus, another question: How did this flat, anemic monotheism ever emerge and take root?

Isn't our belief in one God simply the biblical faith we have inherited from the Christian churches and ultimately from Israel? Good question. Answer: It is advisable to call this common assumption firmly in doubt. For this belief in one God, who has been creating the world but who remains nameless and dwells above all times and places, is, in fact, a modern development; not until the Enlightenment and the rise of Romanticism did this notion become widespread. This idea of the "one God" strikes Jewish believers and Christians (especially the Orthodox, Catholics, and classical Protestants), not to mention Muslims, as pretty frigid. This faraway God, who never changes colors and thus rarely if ever compels people to show theirs, is so ghostly, and especially so neutral, that he or she (why not it?) seems only a kind of "Super-reality."

The more thought you give this Being the more incomprehensible it becomes. While it may appeal to our sense of mystery, it somehow remains baffling. It could be adorable, but who is to tell? This God remains faceless, without countenance, and thus, not a God of visions and dreams. A God who invites discussion maybe, but who elicits no real talk; certainly not a God who induces prophets to talk (or preachers to really "say it"). No God, therefore, who inspires deeply felt prayer, or liturgy—whether of the solemn kind with hymns of praise, or the exuberant kind with dancing and singing and clapping of hands in the Lord's presence.

This God is a remote Supreme Being, as deadly silent as the endless, silent spaces of the universe (which Pascal found so frightening). Or perhaps (in the manner of the ancient Stoics) it is a kind, reasonable, exceedingly subtle gas that permeates all things with its presence (but which nobody has anything much to do with). Or perhaps (in the man-



"Here comes the one, true God."

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ner of the romantics or the modern humanists), it is the Higher Being, best approached philosophically, in which case it is apt to make us, modern, self-conscious human beings, aware of *our own* immortal, profoundly spiritual nature. (Thus God may have drifted out of our ken, but we turn out to have become more deeply religious in the process. Peculiar, isn't it?)

Again, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim believers have problems with so rarefied an understanding of God. Not that they are against it; they just find it terribly incomplete and impersonal. In this God, they hardly recognize the Living God: YHWH the Lord of Heaven and Earth, or God the Father of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, or Allah, Great and Merciful.

Yet, even this minimal divine Being does something to us. It gives rise to higher thoughts. It reminds us that there is more than meets the eye, more than can be had, acquired, gotten under control, or brought to heel. It suggests that all creatures are inherently worthy of respect, and especially every human being, without exception or distinction based on class, race, or sex. Thus even this ethereal God reminds us moderns of the unity of the world-order and of our responsibility for universal conciliation. That is no small thing in our human world, violent and divided as it has been from time immemorial. Belief in one God helps inspire humanity, in the face of all this dissociation and dissipation, not to abandon the search for new things, new knowledge, new ways; it positively encourages us to hold onto our high hopes for unity, reasonableness, meaning, solidarity, cooperation, peace.

Look around in India or Southeast Asia or Japan; you may soon find yourself wondering how we modern Westerners have managed to reduce, in the name of reason, the entire supernatural world to one bland lowest common theological denominator—God.

Divine Menageries?

"Believing in at-most-one God." It sounds a bit cynical. Still, do not most of us find it reasonable to believe in one, and only one, divine being—"one God of the universe," as a Passover Seder song puts it? Monotheism is ingrained in us; if there is more than one god, we spontaneously figure, none of them is really God.

That may very well be logically and theologically correct; it is not what humanity has always and everywhere felt and thought. It is far from being thought and felt everywhere today. Look around in India or Southeast Asia or Japan; you may soon find yourself wondering how we modern Westerners have managed to reduce, in the name of reason, the entire supernatural world to one bland lowest common theological denominator—God. Notice India's many shrines, or read one of the *Vedas* in translation, or drive around Bali; let yourself be fascinated by the Hindu world, so alert to the staggering and often overwhelming diversity of life forms, life forces, and living spirits—a powerful and far from peaceful torrent of vital energy, emanating ultimately from the all-encompassing but utterly inaccessible One. Or take a walk in Bangkok, with its thousands of statues and statuettes of the Buddha. All of them obviously carry the same message, yet all of them also acknowledge the countless experiences that affect human life, and the innumerable storms to which it is exposed. Those images are meant to place all that scrambling and struggling in the perspective of *Nirvana*, the cool, transcendent, perfectly quiescent peace of soul that has literally "Nothing" in common with the hot busyness of daily life. Or walk into a *wayang* show in Java, and watch all the gods, godlings, heroes, and demons that populate the *Ramayana* and *Marabharata* epics, recounted from time immemorial. Take time to listen to modern Javanese youngsters, and discover that the moral and religious imagination of innumerable Indonesians continues to be controlled by these great epics. And while you are there, visit a Chinese temple in one of the big cities, with its statues and statuettes, big and small, kitschy and elegant, representing not just the Buddha, but all kinds of gods and heroes and sages and fools and protectors and fiends.

Now *those* are the kinds of places you want to go to—small, insignificant person that you are. So you go, alone or with your family or your neighbors and friends, to make an offering or just to think or implore or lament, with your whole perplexed, torn-apart self, with your family feuds and your whole assortment of worries. There you can get squared away with all those invisible, inexplicable forces that dominate your life.

We, visitors from the West, must slow down to take in what is happening in such places. If we do, we may begin to realize, in a surge of either anxiety or realism, how we, too, in the monotheistic West, let ourselves be moved and guided and baffled and terrified by all kinds of prevailing or controlling mentalities and powers and authorities, big or small, cosmic or human, not to mention the inhuman. Then a thought may occur. Could it be that we in the West think as monotheists, without actually being such?

Back home again, you may find yourself stopping by a museum and savoring the quiet, stately figures, animal and human, by means of which the ancient Egyptians placed humanity's varied story in the context of the invisible world with its untold powers and forces. Or you may sense that it is really unseemly to dismiss, with typically modern arrogance, the worlds of the Greek and Roman gods and heroes as "divine menageries." Yes, you could do worse than read somebody like Cicero on the subject. In his *The Nature of the*

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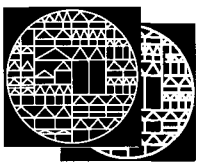
Gods, he left us a penetrating account of the religiosity of his day, though in the end his assessment of polytheism was mainly negative. But at least he helps us realize the notion that belief in one God is anything but ordinary.

In this way, too, you may begin to realize (unless an excess of rational prejudice has you deaf and blind) how many phenomena in the world really support polytheism. Take our earth with its amazing variety of landscapes and climates; look at the immense realms of plants and animals, not to mention humanity. All of them undeniably ordered and interrelated, yet also startlingly and awesomely dissimilar, and far from harmonious. Such observations open us to the inherent riddles of the universe. We discover that it is all really beyond us; really, it is all a bit much, everything seems charged with invisible energies.

That, if anything, is the most characteristic feature of polytheism: the stunning, irresistible omnipresence of the spiritual and the divine within our restless world (and in that sense not really above or beyond it). These invisible powers and influences are legion; it is characteristic of divinity to be multitudinous and to vary according to places and seasons. Yet always and everywhere it is part of human life—often benign, sometimes playful or roguish or mischievous, sometimes appalling or truly malicious, always enigmatic. It is almost palpable, too: a cross-fire of forces and processes: lunar, solar, astral, planetary, terrestrial, subterranean, pelagic, climatic, vegetable, animal, ethnic, dynastic, familial, social, political, you name it—a measureless mix of influences, subject to nothing but the One-Inexorable-World-Order, stark blind, unknown, and unloved.

What does it mean to be religious in such a world? Most of all, you find yourself steeped in narratives about the unseen world and its denizens. Thanks to these, you live in an encompassing system of cultivated attitudes and relationships—all of them incorporated in a web of traditional practices and observances in which awe, devotion, fear, subservience, and sometimes abject obsequiousness alternate with divination and playing the odds, with cunning, calculated reverence, and with desperate attempts at suborning the powers that be or buying them off, and even with recklessness, revolt, and hubris.

To have a dark intuition of the world's coherence and at the same time to experience its obvious disharmony on a daily basis is very perplexing. No wonder that the world of polytheism is characterized by division and tension. Each power, even the highest, controls only particular locales and seasons, so that jealousy governs the world. That is why mythologies are rife with rivalry. The unseen powers vie with each other; they are partial and rarely compassionate; often they will play games with particular regions and human communities, and they do not always play fair by a long shot. No wonder human life is unpredictable. No wonder human communities are apt to be rivals, not to say hereditary enemies. The simple fact is that all interests operate at cross-purposes; the nomad's death is the farmer's breath. So, if people want to create any order and stability at all, or



COMMONWEAL

The Next Generation

The Commonweal Endowment

A message from Chairman Dennis O'Brien

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at any rate within the circle of their own experience, they will do well to practice their own religion, sensibly and with moderation if possible. This means: take into account the invisible powers and forces and comply with their wishes, preferably out of piety, but at least out of enlightened self-interest. For only if you oblige the gods, the heroes, and the powers-that-be are they likely to be in your corner. Or at least you will have a chance of keeping their influence within limits. Of course, you must stay vigilant. For that reason, religiosity demands a fair amount of self-discipline. But that, too, has a real advantage: it keeps you modest, and conscious of your place in this overwhelming world. For along with everything and everybody else, you are at the mercy of the play of powers and forces. And in the end, you are no match for them.

But even that has a bright side: in the end nobody is morally responsible. The great comfort of polytheism and mythology is the unburdened conscience. For in the last resort, life is a matter not of taking things in hand but of handing things over, not of giving of yourself but of giving in to what plays. So just play along in the ancient game, go along to get along, do what you have to do. Even do your worst! Isn't the bottom line that we really can't help it?

The great comfort of polytheism and mythology is the unburdened conscience. For in the last resort, life is a matter not of taking things in hand but of handing things over, not of giving of yourself but of giving in to what plays.

Israel's God—God the Father of Jesus Christ

Only those who appreciate that Israel was part of a cluster of civilizations in which polytheism was wholly unproblematic can grasp the uniqueness of its faith. In the ancient Near East, Israel stood alone. Religiously speaking, it must have looked as explosively aggressive in its world as Islam does today in Africa and India. Like its neighbors, Israel acknowledged the existence of all kinds of gods and spiritual powers. But instead of being awed by them and honoring them, it lived in awe of, praised, gave thanks to, implored, served, and obeyed GOD—and nothing and nobody else. Israel's First Commandment, therefore, was diametrically opposed to everything that passed for religion in the ancient world: "In my Presence, there shall not be any other gods for you." This faith in God is so singular that it strikes one as nothing short of a revelation, and Israel is the first to declare that it is precisely that. Ordinary historical realism demands, therefore, that we, twentieth-century Westerners, who think monotheism is wholly reasonable, allow Israel's claim that its faith in GOD is a matter of being exceptionally favored.

Accordingly, nowhere and never does Israel's faith degenerate into a habit; it remains an immeasurably deep privilege, cherished in a living (and hence flexible) faith tradition. This is confirmed rather than contradicted by the fact that in the history of both Israel and later Judaism one prophetic figure after another will be carrying on against the worship of other gods and of the powers-that-be. But since Israel's God is GOD, how could its faith ever become routine?

Before Israel's God, gods and powers and forces and heroes pale into insignificance. They turn into ordinary denizens of the heavens and the world: spirits, angels, demons, immortalized human beings perhaps. For GOD is beyond compare. "Which of the inhabitants of the heavens is comparable to the LORD, and which of the mighty ones is a match for the LORD?" "Not one among the gods is like you, LORD." That is why GOD is called "God of gods," "Lord of the dominations," "Sovereign of the heavens," "God from everlasting to everlasting," "Lord of the earth and everything belonging to it." Obviously, you cannot abandon yourself, in praise and thanksgiving and supplication, to such a God, while at the same time keeping at hand the powers-that-be, just in case. For it is impossible to serve GOD only as needed, sensibly and with moderation. With the God of All ("of heaven and earth") you just do not negotiate or bargain. Once you understand that you have everything you are and have from GOD, you can only dedicate yourself to GOD with everything you have and are: "with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

This God is literally beyond all that is. First of all in holiness. In this regard, Israel is indeed amazed at its privileged self:

> When Israel went forth from Egypt,
> Jacob's house from a gibbering breed,
> Judah came to be God's Sanctuary,
> Israel God's Dominion.

Incomprehensible. But the height of incomprehensibility is this: this startlingly holy God is no stranger. Moses, face to face with God's holy fire, takes off his sandals and hears: "I Am Who I Am." He prays that he be allowed to see God's glory and hears: "I will favor whom I favor, and befriend whom I befriend." This means: "Just don't ask; just accept. Whoever and however I may be, I am with you, I favor you, I love you." GOD is friend—not faraway but nearby, not menacing but faithful. Israel's Holy One inspires awe, but does not create distance; GOD embraces.

To accept this revelation is being born anew. To be addressed in this fashion lays bare something unfathomable and wholly original at the core of every human being; it awakens a memory which seemed lost forever. In Israel's faith-experience, humanity recovers and recalls its native affinity with GOD. This is far more than an intimation of a shadowy existence after death; it is a positive aspiration to everlasting life. Like no other creature, humanity turns out to carry

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the Living God's ineradicable image and likeness in itself. Being human means living by an impulse implanted by GOD.

This has direct consequences for all Israel's doings. If God "has got the whole world in his hand," then human behavior in the world must not be determined by the inexorable play of the powers-that-be. Israel cannot salve its conscience any longer; it cannot deny its freedom any longer, nor can it satisfy itself with myths, idols, and ideologies; it can no longer sidestep its responsibility for itself, for the nations, for the world. Faith in GOD is inseparable from the works of justice and conciliation, laid down in Covenants old and new, and (later on, in Judaism) specifically in the Torah. In this way, Israel will always feel the burden of God's plan for the world and humanity on its shoulders; it will serve GOD by becoming God's agent, creative and increasingly mature, in a world not only unfinished, but torn apart. In this way, Israel gets to acknowledge within itself the germ of the truly human life: in our deepest selves, all of us are called to enter upon Israel's dignity, as the Easter liturgy prays. If GOD is the stamp of our being, the world is ours: nothing and nobody is not worth our notice.

In Israel's footsteps, we Christians have been privileged to watch GOD actualizing this reborn humanity with a new, incomparable intensity, in Jesus Christ: the Covenant embodied, the Torah incarnate, the Word made flesh. "On him you have conferred authority over all that lives; he is to give everlasting life to all that you have entrusted to him. And everlasting life is this: to know you, the one true God, as well as Him—the one you sent, Jesus Christ."

Thus favored by God and made responsible for the life of the world you are empowered to go forward, from era to era, from habitat to habitat. For GOD is tied to neither place nor time, whereas gods and powers and authorities are dominant only here and there and now and then. This is why Jews and Christians, and Muslims as well, cannot sidestep their obligation to declare their God-given sense of both privilege and responsibility to the world, and to express themselves accordingly at all times and in all places. They will do so in countless forms of civilization, at home as well as in exile, whether free or oppressed, and for richer for poorer. In the long run, they will find themselves, in faith, at home in exile, morally free in oppression, and inwardly rich in poverty. Thus they will proclaim, praise, serve, and represent GOD, against the grain if there is no alternative. In this way, too, they will get used to taking responsibility, in GOD's name—in the teeth of the powers-that-be if necessary.

For GOD is tied to neither place nor time, whereas gods and powers and authorities are dominant only here and there and now and then.

All of this harbors a deadly danger, of course. One fatal step (a step, we know, taken from the beginning, and no longer to be thought away), and the sense of privilege will degenerate into a sense of superiority: human beings will set themselves up as God's equivalent, and faith in God will cheapen into self-assertion, intolerance, and fanaticism. Only if, personally and communally, we keep experiencing our faith in the "One God of the world" as a lasting privilege, and not as the most reasonable thing in the world (let alone as God's seal of approval on our prejudices), will our faith in God be a source, not just of tolerance, but of creative, civilized realism, rooted in a deep, clearsighted, and truly searching appreciation of everything that the world offers to our quest for true life.

One God of the World: The Great Surmise

Feeling privileged makes one appreciative. Those who feel privileged have a taste for what is truly precious, anywhere and at any time. Accordingly, those who feel privileged by God and reborn in faith are apt to discover and appreciate the vestiges of that privilege and the germ of that rebirth in humane civilizations of every kind. Great Jewish thinkers like Philo of Alexandria and Moses Maimonides, great Muslim thinkers like Ibn Sina and Ibn Roschd, an early Christian apologist like Justin, and church fathers like Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine—all of them have perceived God's Word and intuited God's Countenance, not only in Israel's prophets and sages, but also in Socrates, Heraclitus, Plato, and Aristotle, and in the civilizations that have drawn nourishment from those wellsprings of the human spirit.

Christian thinkers of the second, third, and fourth centuries came to regard the Stoics, with their disciplined life style and their respect for transcendent intelligence, as allies, not adversaries. Seventeenth-century Catholic missionaries in China recognized "the Lord of the Heavens" in writings by Lao-tse and other sages. Roberto de Nobili, in the South of India, ventured to take the haughtiness of the Brahmin into the bargain, so as to combine his deep respect for the nobility of their civilization with catechesis. In our own days, Christians have beheld the Spirit of God and Jesus in great souls: Mahatma Gandhi and Dag Hammarskjöld, and *countless* other peaceable, dedicated people. It is deeply Christian to say this. Did not Jesus himself acknowledge that he had found in some gentiles the kind of faith he had been vainly searching for in Israel?

Live faith in the Living God, in other words, must prove itself true in our capacity for religious surmise. It must open our eyes to the splendid variety of non-Jewish, non-Christian, non-Muslim religious sensibilities, discernible at all times and in all places. It even remains discernible in the sallow monotheism of North America. For to the eye blessed with faith, the Living God is simply the One Who is ever Present yet ever Veiled, ever Old and ever New, always according to times and places. This is how God is God. Think about it. Pray. Even better, be thankful and offer praise. □

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Frank McConnell

WHAT HATH PHIL WROUGHT?

A coarsening of culture

Phil Donahue, he says, is retiring. This will be his last season hosting the talk show he's stage-managed for coming-on thirty years. He's already appeared on "Larry King"—Larry being one of the very many mutations he's spawned—where, bathed in adulation, he got to be sensitive and sincere about his commitment to truth, justice, and the American Way, express his regret at hanging up the spurs, affirm his decision to move on, and perhaps do even greater good in the future.

Now Phil has always been great at sensitive and sincere. In fact—one-trick pony that he is—that's about all he ever *has* been good at. And that was enough to make him, his show, and his *Weltanschauung* one of the phenomenal events in the evolution of TV culture—and one of the most influential. Donahue *is* the afternoon talk show; and, conversely, the afternoon talk show—currently America's most thriving form of performance art—*is* Donahue. So, as the grand old man of the genre takes his final bow—and believe it, he's going to take a *lot* of final bows in the months to come, like a coloratura whose pipes are shot but whose fans are still rabid—it's worth talking about what he actually accomplished and what he leaves.

What he leaves behind, of course, is the plethora of talk shows that, now and for the imaginable future, infest the cable: Leeza, Oprah, Geraldo, Richard Bey, Tempestt, Rolanda, George and Alana, Jenny Jones, Ricki Lake, Jerry Springer, Gordon Elliott, Montel—Gawd! Ever had ants—I mean ever *really* had ants—in your kitchen? You watch the little buggers troop along in insouciant phalanx toward the one crumb of fried chicken you dropped in your midnight snack, and their single-mindedness is so invincibly stupid, or stupidly invincible, that you just want to crawl back into bed and make believe they're not there.

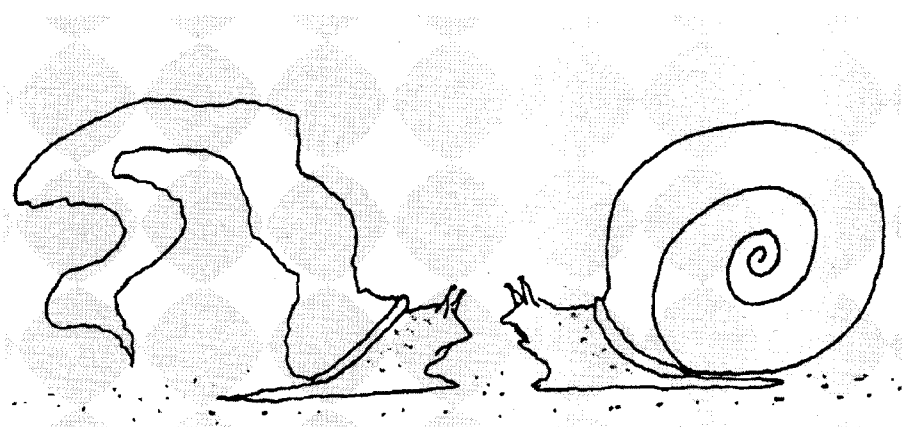
William Bennett and several other of our self-appointed moral pit bulls, to be sure, don't want to crawl back under the comforter. They've raised a hue and cry—a donahue and cry?—against the talk shows altogether as a coarsening and demeaning of the national sensibility. And they're partly right. Check out any of the afternoon fare. The subjects of the shows are increasingly the stuff of ~~stan~~dup one-liners: "My Boyfriend Slept with My Sister"; "My Mom Dresses Like a Slut"; "My Husband Has a Live-in Gay Lover"; and on and on, like the column of ants in the kitchen, tiny tragedies—though to the victims no tragedy is ever "tiny"—willing, even eager to spread their shabby, inexpressibly sad wares and woes to the host (who may or may not adopt the mask of sympathy), to the alternately jeering and applauding studio audience and the vivisectionist eyes, of course, of the millions (with TV it's always at least millions) of viewers for whom the ghastly pageant is played out.

TV seems to have found a really new way for humans—guests, host, audience, and viewers all—to debase themselves. This is tantamount to inventing a *new* sin, and should be recognized with appropriate respect. And it's truly appalling (trust me, I've watched this stuff), like a car crash on the side of the road or the homeless six-months-unwashed guy on the other side of the street and you just try *not* to look. So to that extent, Bennett and his scattered ilk are correct in their condemnation, and Phil Donahue is the fountainhead of the plaque, patient zero.

But: Bennett & Co. get what's wrong about TV talk *wrong*. And Donahue, though he's the progenitor of the monster is also, like Frankenstein, its victim. His retirement was all but forced: his show has been dropped from the New York market, which is the TV equivalent of the splendid Yiddish proverb, "When five men tell you you're drunk—lie down."

Okay, he did more than his share of transvestite-lesbian-Nazi-nuns-and-the-men-who-love-them shows. But he also did a lot of shows on issues of some moment, on feminism, racism, on political candidacies, and all of them conducted without the pub-brawl shouting that is nowadays the dreadful norm. Try to imagine Sally Jesse Raphael or—*feh*!—Richard Bey doing an hour with Jesse Jackson or Jerry Brown, or even trying to pass the time of day with George Will.

And that was Phil's problem. A good Notre Dame, ex-Catholic boy converted to White Liberalism (a faith with only one dogma: if thou *carest*, thou art



"Please...I don't want to hear any more about your rotten childhood."

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saved), and caring as all hell, he crafted a form of TV whose darker possibilities he either ignored or misunderstood, until the proliferation of those shadows drove him out of the ratings. He just couldn't get as down and dirty as he, himself, had made it possible to get.

Which is part of what Bennett gets so wrong about the talk-show phenomenon. It's not that the creeps—and creeps they generally are—who serve as guests debase the national soul by airing their tacky agonies. There've *always* been tacky agonies, and there have always been ways of airing them to the community, and the community has always been ravenous for them. Anybody who says he doesn't dig tawdry gossip is either a liar or a saint, and saints don't watch TV and liars just push up the ratings.

Donahue's great *coup de théâtre*, the key to his success, and his dreadful legacy, is to have elevated gossip to the level of information, and thereby debased information to the level of gossip. Look: as that awful man and sublime writer John Cheever said, there are facts and there are truths, and they are not the same. Susan Smith watched her two kids drown so that she could be sexier for her boyfriend: that is a fact. And Newt Gingrich says that the Smith horror is an indication of the dangers of the liberal agenda: that's a pseudo-truth (or lie) based on a tabloid-mentality, gossipmongers confusion of fact and truth. And it's a confusion that wounded-deer liberal Phil and charging-bull conservative Newt share.

Before Donahue, talk shows (Dinah Shore, Joe Pine, Merv Griffin, Mike Douglass) had a different look. Host and guests sat around a table or on a sofa, onstage, while the audience looked on. Donahue broke the invisible fourth wall between spectators and spectacle. Prowling the bleachers with hand-held mike, firing questions at the guests—physicists, poets, or perverts—literally imprisoned in their chairs on the stage, he became not the host, but the ringleader: of the mob in the studio, and by implication of the mob watching in their dens. It was the democratization of TV talk—quite graphically, power to the people (with Phil as the ultimate *vox populi*); and its noxious side-effect was to make the audience, the crowd, the phone-ins, the polls, the final arbiter between fact and truth. And, for all the good intentions of the change, how could coarsening not follow?

Today, almost every talk show on the Tube follows the Donahue populist format. And we have a Speaker of the House who speaks like a talk-show host, and a president whose main talent seems to be acting like the perfect talk-show guest. And Donahue, in the waning months of his career, does more and more shows the old-fashioned way, seated onstage at a table with his guests. Is he just tired? Or does he, maybe, realize that the mindset he largely created is, in the last analysis, both a cause and a symptom of our present exile into silliness and triviality-masquerading-as-earnestness? *Wer weiss?*

Poor Frankenstein. He meant no harm; but did little good. □

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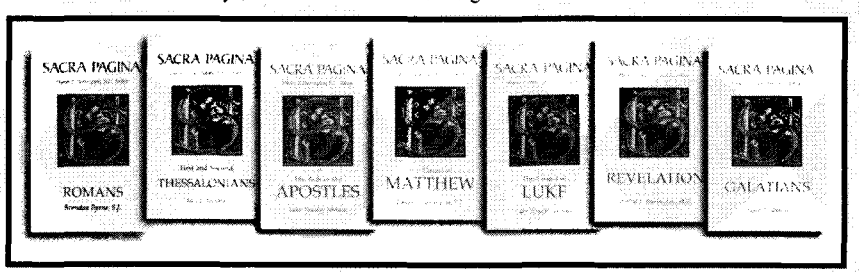

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What happened to the Left?

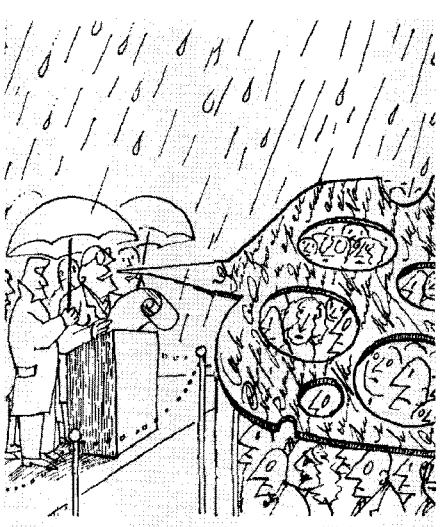
The Twilight of Common Dreams
Why America Is Wracked by Culture Wars
Todd Gitlin
Metropolitan Books, $25, 294 pp.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese

Like many today, Todd Gitlin mourns the eclipse of common dreams and deplores the narrow identity politics that fuels our escalating culture wars. But, unlike many who express similar concerns, he unflinchingly writes as a man of the Left, which, notwithstanding the admirable values he defends, occasionally draws him into blind alleys. Gitlin's views frequently echo those of Jean Bethke Elshtain, the late Christopher Lasch, and a variety of other fervent proponents of social justice, civility, and democratic renewal, but he appears considerably more wedded than they to social and economic policies that depend heavily upon the intervention and expenditures of the federal government. Consequently, even at his most thoughtful and humane—and he is incontrovertibly both—he risks confusing his readers about his own position, not to mention misestimating the prospects for an easing of our national travails.

By way of dramatizing the excessive forms that identity politics may assume, Gitlin opens *Twilight of Common Dreams* with an account of the battle over the adoption of a textbook that wracked the schools and city of Oakland, California. In this instance, the victory of the multicultural extremists left the school children and teachers of Oakland without any textbook at all. Gitlin sadly acknowledges the unconscionable "squandering of energy" in which the "obsession with separate identities" has resulted, conceding that "identity politics is a very bad turn." How can it be, he asks throughout the book, that the Left, which once "stood for universal values," has succumbed to an expanding congeries of special interests, while the Right, which has always stood for special interests, can get away with the claim that it represents the common good?

Much of the remainder of the book develops the claims that the Left, in embracing identity politics, has betrayed its history and purpose and that the Right has never stood, and does not now stand, for the common interests, much less identity, of American society. In attempting to explain how we could ever have reached our current disastrous condition, Gitlin begins with the claim that the very idea of American commonality, or time-honored national identity, is a myth which emerged from the exigencies of mobilization during the First and Second World Wars and was fed by the hysteria of the McCarthy period, only to unravel under the débacle



of Vietnam and the economic changes that followed upon the consolidation of a global market. We have always been, he insists, a heterogeneous society, composed of a myriad of groups with discrete purposes and interests. Worse, the powerful never delivered on their vaunted political promises of equality and freedom. To the contrary, they built their fortunes and prestige upon the enslavement of Africans, the dispossession of American Indians, the exploitation of workers of all ethnicities, and the oppression of women. Under these centrifugal conditions, the Left preeminently came to stand for the universal human values of the equality among and dignity of all persons notwithstanding differences of race, sex, national origin, and religion.

Gitlin takes great, and frequently justifiable, pride in the legacy of the Left in this regard, although, in any number of ways, he sorely shortchanges the claims of those he views as class enemies. The Constitution, for example, does not contain a word about the equality of individuals—only about equality among the states. And it was framed in a period in which most of the world still accepted, and many parts of it still practiced, various forms of unfree labor, including slavery, and virtually the entire world took the subordination of women to men as natural. Gitlin is less than fair in charging its elite framers with bad faith because their vaunted "equality" excluded slaves and women. The Founders were honest men who could speak of equality while holding slaves and upholding male authority because they understood equality in accordance with a Christian tradition that recognized human rights within a structure of social hierarchy. Like most contemporary critics, Gitlin is not hearing what they, for better or worse, actually said.

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American history has never divided into the neat Manichaean confrontation between privileged elites (bad) and oppressed groups (good). The antislavery movement and, especially, the Republican party, included a goodly share of wealthy and powerful individuals, many of whom would grow wealthier and more powerful with Emancipation. The cutting edge of the final push for woman suffrage came from the National Woman's Party, the members of which were frequently affluent and openly opposed special attention to the needs of working women. As these and countless other examples demonstrate, the division of civic virtue and moral responsibility between the Right and the Left has never been as clear-cut as Gitlin would wish. The wealthy have normally tended to protect their wealth and frequently to increase it at the expense of others, but they have often divided among themselves in their assessment of tactics and principles. Nor have working people consistently resisted the temptations of racism, sexism, and ethnic chauvinism.

These caveats should hardly deserve mention were it not that they point to the central weakness in an otherwise fine book, namely Gitlin's determination to resuscitate the Left by unilaterally discrediting the Right. Few commentators upon the contemporary scene understand the depressing complexity and disquieting prospects for change better than Gitlin, as his chapter on the social and economic transformation of the United States during the last thirty years confirms. He cogently, if rapidly, sketches the world with which we have all become too familiar—a world in which the gap between rich and poor has greatly expanded, the chances of children to do as well as, much less better than, their parents have evaporated, and the importance of interest groups in garnering scarce resources has mushroomed. No one understands better than he that the politics of identity is dividing those who most need a common allegiance and program. And, having argued that this politics directly serves mega-corporations' palpable interest in reducing communities and families to so many competing atoms, I was delighted to see Gitlin advance a similar argument. Yet for all his intelligence, humanity, and courage in protesting the excesses of the politically correct multiculturalism that has stormed the nation's schools and college campuses, Gitlin remains imprisoned by a vision of what would constitute a worthy Left that may not be adequate to our times.

Gitlin is at his best and most moving in defending the universalistic and, yes, Enlightenment legacy of the Left, which has traditionally insisted upon uniting people solely on the basis of their class position. He correctly denounces personal or identity politics as the direct legacy of fascism and reaction. He even bravely acknowledges that the African-American experience may indeed be unique and not easily respond to anyone's preconceived models. And withal, he clings to the necessary beneficence of federal programs and enhanced federal spending, thus implicitly endorsing a welfare-state model of justice. One might think that the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe and the well-documented difficulties with which the Western European states are wrestling might encourage us to think along new lines. One might even think that some of the ideas of those whom Gitlin dismisses as the Right merited attention, notably the need to strengthen two-parent families and private support for children. Gitlin knows that the so-called Right is no monolith, but he is not much interested in its internal divisions and discussions, and especially not in the Christian Right, which does not represent large corporations and rejects the free-marketeers' willingness to throw poor people on the garbage heap.

There are grounds for criticizing the Christian Right as there are for criticizing almost every political group today. We do confront a new and dangerous situation, and it is hardly surprising that no group has a neat solution. But before Gitlin decides that the United States never had a common culture, he might recall that Protestant Christianity has, from the arrival of Europeans, constituted the bedrock of American civil and, yes, political society. Today, Protestantism must share its place with Roman Catholicism, Judaism, and, in lesser measure, Islam, not to mention the myriad of other faiths. Withal, the fraying shreds of our national virtues remain Judeo-Christian, and their legacy includes respect for the individual person, the sanctity of marriage, and the mutual obligation of parents and children; charity to the weak; equality of souls before God if not equality of material condition; and, *pace* Gitlin, universalism. These virtues are under assault from the Left and the Right and, especially, from the triumph of the notion of the individual as consumer and as interest group, which both Left and Right feed. But it is difficult to imagine a renewal of Left or of Right which does not begin with the promise and the obligations this religious heritage imposes. □

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese *teaches at Emory University. Her most recent book is* "Feminism Is Not the Story of My Life": How the Elite Women's Movement Has Lost Touch with Women's Real Concerns *(Doubleday).*

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THE SHACKLES OF SEXUAL LIBERTY

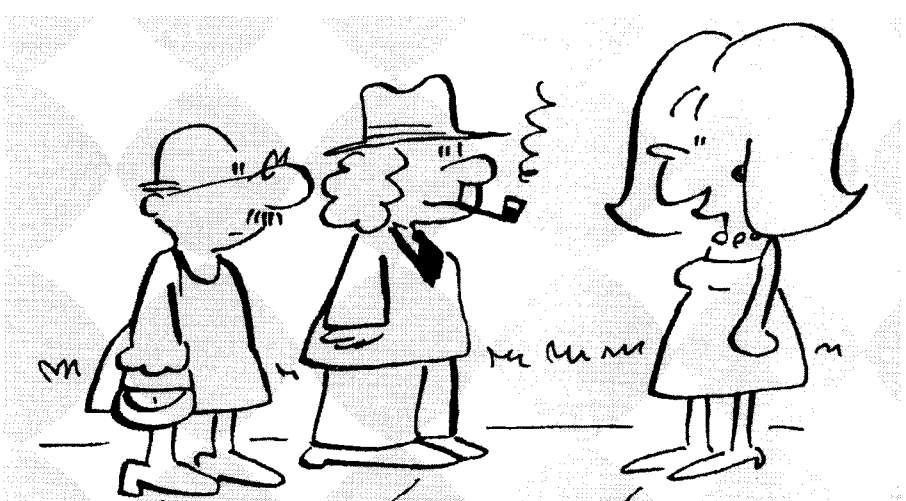
"Feminism Is Not the Story of My Life"
How Today's Feminist Elite Has Lost Touch with the Real Concerns of Women
Elizabeth Fox-Genovese
Doubleday, $23.95, 275 pp.

Margaret O'Brien Steinfels

Family values, now a motif in every politician's theme song, often carries an anti-feminist refrain among the most conservative. Some liberals and feminists, in reaction, see the appeal to family values as an attack on women's rights. Defensive stands toward teenaged pregnancies, family breakdown, and sexual license often make the political Left seem willfully blind to the double bind that women, especially young and poor ones, face in a sexually liberated world. Conservatives want to end this chaos by cutting welfare and Medicaid. Meanwhile, the organized women's movement focuses on protecting what it thinks is the only bulwark against male domination—abortion rights. In this atmosphere, it is virtually impossible to stand apart and have an honest discussion about the issues that most deeply affect women's lives—men, sex, children, families, mothers, jobs, growing up female, femininity, and female stereotypes.

Though it is unlikely to convince the most ardent feminist or resolute conservative, *"Feminism Is Not the Story of My Life"* opens a discussion that has been too long delayed. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, a self-identified member of the feminist elite (professor of history at Emory University and noted historian), brings an open mind to conversations with ordinary women who share her disquiet with the agendas of both feminism and feminism's harshest critics. Informal and anecdotal, consisting of interviews and conversations with African-Americans, Latinas, Southern belles, college students, career women, retirees, mothers, and blue-collar workers—Fox-Genovese's research does not carry the weight of representative samples and in-depth interviews. It has something better—the ring of reality.

These conversations are critical of a feminist agenda that treats men and children as the enemy, that regards sexual liberation as a boon to women, and that sees interest in traditional domestic and womanly concerns as a throwback to the fifties. The conservative agenda, on the other hand, ignores the economic forces that make women necessary breadwinners even in intact families; tries to penalize single mothers by making it ever more difficult for them to work and care for children; and shows little appreciation of the dire odds that face even the most conscientious parents in raising children in America's inner cities. Both feminists and conservatives, she argues, are out of touch with American women and American families. Because no political or cultural middle ground has emerged, many women have written their own definitions and done their own bargaining about what it means to be "liberated."



"How's the role-reversal working out?"

"Feminism Is Not the Story of My Life" sums up this struggle: to do what women have always done as wives and mothers while trying to take advantage of new opportunities. For some, it is the chance for more education; for others better jobs; for still others, even those in traditional roles, there is a sense that dependence on a man is no longer necessary or appropriate. Maria Ramierez, studying for a high school equivalency degree and the happily married mother of three, when asked by Fox-Genovese what she wants for her daughters, "unhesitatingly answers: 'Independence'.... Not having to count on a man."

Being able to break loose from an abusive or philandering husband because a woman can support herself and her children also figures in the independence equation. But so does putting a career on hold while staying home with small children. These examples are typical of the stories Fox-Genovese hears. Most women want to take on new opportunities without neglecting or penalizing their children; they want to go to school, bring home the bacon, and have satisfying marriages and happy homes.

What makes the balance so difficult for so many women to strike? Answer: Sexual liberation.

Fox-Genovese argues that feminists have made sexual liberation and abortion the core of women's rights and the litmus test for a voice in the women's movement—in her view an up-scale, elite movement. Her class analysis of the

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sexual revolution—the delinking of sex and morality—may not appeal to everyone, but I think she has it right. In chapters on the "Sexual Revolution" and "Living with Sexual Liberation," she shows that educated, middle- and upper-class women have the resources to ameliorate the often unexpected social and economic consequences of sexual liberty because they have bargaining power with men, with parents, and with society. Most working-class and poor women do not, and they pay the price, above all in the struggle to raise and support children on their own.

This is a book that will please neither feminists nor proponents of "family values." But it is a brave book that raises all the right questions. □

Margaret O'Brien Steinfels *is editor of* Commonweal.

REMAINS OF THE NOVELIST

The Unconsoled
Kazuo Ishiguro
Knopf, $25, 535 pp.

Linda Simon

Kazuo Ishiguro is best known for his third novel, *Remains of the Day*, which won England's Booker Prize in 1989 and subsequently was rendered into a film of considerable acclaim. It would be difficult, indeed, to reread the book without seeing Anthony Hopkins as Stevens, the very British butler whose unquestioned loyalty to his role and his master causes him to forsake those who love him, to repress his own feelings, and to define self-fulfillment only through his work. Love, repression, and the value of work recur as themes in Ishiguro's latest novel, *The Unconsoled*, but this tale is far different from Ishiguro's previous works, including *A Pale View of Hills* (1983) and *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), which were notable for their elegance and economy. *The Unconsoled* reads like a long, very long, anxiety dream: in this case, the anxiety of contemporary culture about the ability of art to offer enlightenment and consolation. "Art," Nietzsche wrote a century ago, "is essentially the affirmation, the blessing, and the deification of existence." The times, and art, have changed.

The Unconsoled introduces us to Ryder, a famous pianist who has arrived in a small European city where he is scheduled to perform. He is tired; this stop is only one of many on a long concert tour. At first, when he cannot remember where he is or where he is expected to be, when he keeps falling asleep and waking at odd hours, we imagine that he is merely disoriented from his travels. But as Ishiguro chronicles his interactions and activities in the days preceding the concert, we come to see that Ryder is more seriously afflicted: he is haunted by memories, filled with regret and guilt over his treatment of others, and, most significantly, beset by anxiety—about the choices he has made, about his value as a pianist, and about art.

The townspeople welcome Ryder with great eagerness and enthusiasm, but soon it is clear that they, too, suffer from anxiety. The quality of their cultural life, they believe, is declining. They do not feel a connection to much of modern art: it does not speak to them in a way that helps them make sense of their lives. Yet, like the rest of us, they have been taught that artists possess some special enlightenment, some talent at illuminating hidden meaning; art reveals truth, does it not? What should they do if they cannot apprehend that truth? When Ryder arrives in their midst, they desperately seek his help. Perhaps, they hope, he can alleviate their fears and enrich their understanding. Perhaps he can reconnect them to a culture that seems increasingly inaccessible to them.

Ryder, besides feeling uncomfortable playing the role of artistic genius, has other problems that distract him from the townspeople's needs. Tenuous stimuli thrust him repeatedly into a menacing past. One recurring memory concerns his relationship with a woman, Sophie, and her young son, Boris. Ryder rejected Sophie's love in order to pursue his career. Instead of settling down and making a home, as she wished, he chose to travel, always in search of the crucial performance that would ensure his reputation. "I have to keep going on

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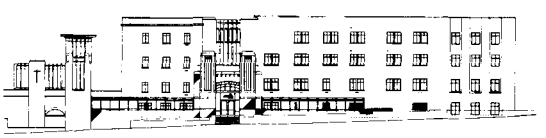

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these trips," Ryder explains to Boris, "because, you see, you can never tell when it's going to come along. I mean the very special one, the very important trip, the one that's very very important, not just for me but for everyone, everyone in the whole world....And you see, once you miss it, there's no going back, it would be too late. It won't matter how hard I travel afterwards, it won't matter, it would be too late...."

Throughout the novel, Ryder is late for appointments, interviews, and photography sessions. He misses buses, loses his sense of direction, and arrives at public gatherings unprepared. Once, he delivers a speech wearing only a dressing gown. The townspeople, however, never question his odd behavior. They make excuses for him, accommodate his needs, and even roundly applaud his efforts. They are used to the eccentricities of artists: the local conductor, Ryder soon discovers, is a notorious drunk.

Yet if they accept eccentricity, they deeply fear new ideas and radical change. After Ryder has his photograph taken in front of a monument to Max Sattler, a controversial local hero, he discovers that he has set off a public debate. The citizens do not know whether to revile or worship Sattler's "wild dreams." "He holds an attraction for certain people *precisely because* he's so distant, a piece of local myth," Ryder is told. "Reintroduce him as a serious prospect...then frankly, sir, people here will panic. They will recoil. They will suddenly find themselves clinging to what they know, never mind what misery it has already brought them." In the same way, they recoil from whatever is unfamiliar and uncomfortable in art. What are they to make of the two pieces Ryder considers for his performance: "Globestructures: Option II" or "Asbestos and Fiber"?

"How can people like this, untrained, provincial people, how can they ever understand such things, however great a sense of duty they feel toward the community?" one thoughtful citizen asks Ryder. Although such questions about art and culture are significant and even urgent, *The Unconsoled* is ultimately unsatisfying. Ryder does not emerge as a fully developed character, but rather the embodiment of an intellectual problem. In a book that explores the difficulty—perhaps the impossibility—of communication, even on the most intimate level, one might expect dialogue to be strained; but instead of dialogue, Ishiguro often juxtaposes extended monologues that become unnecessarily repetitious. It may have been Ishiguro's aim to subvert the conventions of the novel as a way of underscoring his theme, but the result is a book lacking the grace and precision that we have come to expect from a writer who, so amply in the past, has proved his intelligence, insight, and talents. □

Linda Simon's *reviews have appeared in the* New York Times Book Review, *among other publications. She is the director of the Writing Center at Harvard University.*

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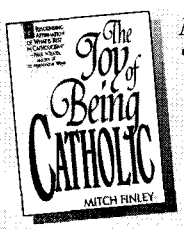

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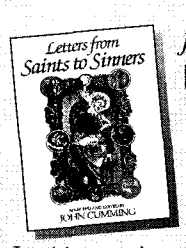

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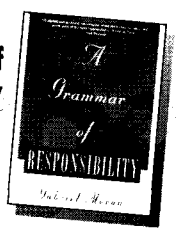

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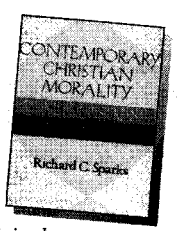

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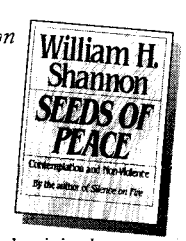

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Lawrence S. Cunningham

Monasteries and prisons have some things in common. Both emphasize a life of penance; both cloister themselves from the "world"; both have residents who get up early, earn very little money, eat nongourmet foods, and survive on routine. Monks, however, are there voluntarily while convicts rarely are. Those parallels came to me as I read John Dear's prison diary written in late 1993 and early 1994. Dear spent his time

Peace behind Bars,
by John Dear,
Sheed & Ward, $14.95, 234 pp.

in various Carolina jails after he and others banged up some Air Force planes as part of a peace protest. Dear is a young Jesuit priest with a gift for writing and a deep well of compassion for the poor.

While in jail, he and his companions (among them Philip Berrigan) wrote letters, read good books, but most of all they engaged in daily Bible study while sustaining themselves on their eucharistic celebrations and periods of prayer. It struck me as I read these pages that Dear's reflections on the Gospel of Mark (the subject of their study until they switched to John late in their days together) makes a very good minicommentary; so good that I've marked passages to read to my students in class.

Dear is good enough a writer to give us quick sketches of the other inmates (mostly African-American), the jailers, and the network of supporters who either wrote (Mother Teresa, the father general of the Jesuits), phoned, or visited. He also brings alive what everyone who ever has visited a prison knows: they are noisy, violent, drab, and awful places to be. The very reality of being in jail forces someone like Dear to reflect constantly on why he is there and what "good" being there might accomplish.

I have always felt that being a pacifist, especially a pacifist who is an activist, is a grace given by God. Not only do I not possess that grace but am fearful to ask for it (the most dangerous prayers are the ones that God answers) because I do not know if I could live with the seeming doubts, paradoxes, and hardships that such a grace might bring. Nonetheless, I am profoundly grateful for such people among us as living reproof to the pathetic commitments we make as Christians.

Dear's journal is powerful spiritual reading and a perfect example of that old monastic practice (*lectio divina*) of the sapiential reading of the Scriptures. It is also new in that his reading is an example of liberation theology in practice. Like the householder in the Gospel, Dear has brought forth old things and new. As Colman McCarthy says in the foreword: Buy this one, sweet child!

I have had a long interest in the tradition of hagiography as a resource for understanding how people in various ages appropriate the gospel and, further, how various ages emphasize particular aspects of gospel practice at the expense of others. To be professionally interested in the lives of saints is to be interested in an area where there is a flood of publication from historians, theologians, and religionists. I found this recent volume edited by Thomas Noble and Thomas Head a welcome addition to the literature. In fact, it arrived on my desk on a day that I was to speak about Saint Augustine in class, affording me the opportunity to read some excerpts of Possidius's *Life of Augustine*, antholo-

Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages,
edited by Thomas F. X. Noble and Thomas Head,
Pennsylvania State University Press, $18.95, 383 pp.

gized in this volume, to my students. At my leisure I have been reading some other of these *Vitae* which range from the late patristic period through the Carolingian Age. Some of these *Vitae* are well known, for example, Sulpicius Severus's "Life of Saint Martin of Tours" which was a "best seller" right down to the Renaissance period and was an important vehicle for spreading the cult of the saint throughout Europe. Noble/Head also give us lives of important figures in the history of early medieval Europe, such as Boniface (the "Apostle of Germany") and Benedict of Aniane, who was a crucial figure in the development of monasticism.

My suspicion is that this work origi-

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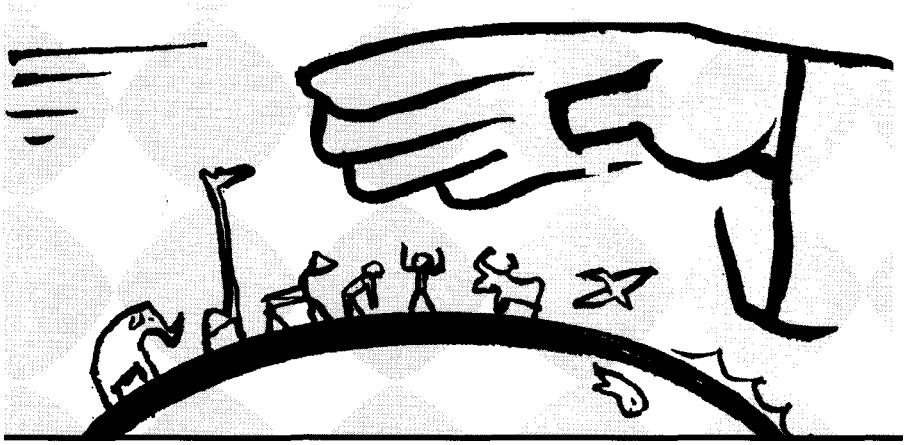

nated in a desire to produce a work for classroom use (both editors are history professors). That would explain some of the attractive features built into the volume. There is a very fine introduction which would serve as an entry into the field of hagiography in general and hagiography in the early medieval period in particular (their time frame ends just before A.D. 1000). At the end of the volume there is a bibliographical essay surveying standard works in the field. At the head of each *Vita* there is a brief introduction with a particular bibliography of sources.

If one were to take the Noble/Head volume and combine it with Jo Ann McNamara's *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages* (1992; reviewed February 12, 1993), which has seventeen female *Vitae* from the fifth to the seventh centuries, one would have a copious collection of material for an academic course. Those who are not academics might equally appreciate these two volumes as representative of a crucial aspect of the Catholic tradition of sanctity.

Sacred Identity: Exploring a Theology of the Person,
by Jane Kopas
Paulist, $11.95, 217 pp.

Jane Kopas has written an engaging book with an arresting angle: that a deep sense of what it means to be linked to a divine creator provides some thick metaphors concerning personal identity. Using a species of the theology of correlation, Kopas thinks through the anthropological and spiritual implications of such terms as the "hidden/revealing God" and "creatureliness" and "made in the image of God" and "kinship in creation." Her strategy is to juxtapose the biblical doctrine of creation, the person of Jesus Christ, and human stories drawn from her own personal experiences and those gleaned from a wide variety of written sources.

Such an exercise is pregnant with possibility as anyone who has ever really thought (as, for example, a Saint Augustine and a Jean Paul Sartre—to cite contrary instances—have done) about what it means to be dependent on and linked to a Creator well understands. Kopas provides her reflections in well-written prose with a quite specific audience in mind: an educated lay audience and/or a college class who may well believe in God but are not quite sure what kind of God it is that they believe in.

From the brief synopsis given above it should not be thought that Kopas reflects on a narrowly vertical axis (that is, "myself and God"). Like John Paul II, Kopas understands that the full context of the Genesis creation account(s) demands that human beings be seen in the context of place and in the context of community. That allows her to link her human metaphors not only vertically to the Creator but horizontally to both human and natural ecologies of dependence and limits. She sees our interdependence with others, creation, and God not by appealing to the faddish tropes of "creation spirituality" but to the more sober realism (she has some good pages on "finitude" and "sin"—no Pollyanna she) of the biblical/theological tradition holistically conceived. The result is a lively and readable book which shows how a serious college teacher and theologically reflective writer can bring forth from the ancient pages of Genesis both old things and new.

A Vision Betrayed: The Jesuits in China and Japan, 1542-1742,
by Andrew C. Ross,
Orbis, $35, 216 pp.

In the concluding chapter of this wonderfully written account of the Jesuit missions to Japan and China, Andrew Ross says that the missionary methods espoused by the Jesuits were so novel (and, we might add, so prescient) that they were a "puzzle that has to be explained."

The great theoretician of this new missionary strategy was the Italian Jesuit, Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606), who was the order's visitor in India and the Far East. Valignano insisted on a number of strategies which accounted for the Jesuit successes in the hitherto closed countries of Japan and China: the need for accurate translations of texts to present Christian doctrine in an accessible language; respect for indigenous culture and mores; resistance to identifying mission activity with the expansion of the commercial interests and *conquistador* mentality; and, finally, exertions to insure a native clergy and hierarchy. The fruit of that inculturated view of mission resulted in a vigorous Catholic presence in both Japan and China which was later suppressed but a still lively Catholic church in India (Valignano died in Goa).

No account of the China mission would be complete without reference to the extraordinary achievements of Matteo Ricci, S.J., whose command of mandarin Chinese won him the respect of the learned classes as a sage. Ross's elegant two chapters on this singular figure are almost worth the price of the book.

The missionary efforts of these intrepid Jesuits came to ruin in the early eighteenth century with the papal rejection of the Chinese rites—a rejection which anticipated the suppression of the Jesuits themselves. One cannot read a

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book like this without thinking of the lessons it teaches for today: lessons about the dangers of too much control from Rome; suspicion of attempts to recast the gospel into other thought forms. By the end of the eighteenth century Christianity was a small sectarian movement bereft of influence in China; the same church had already been suppressed in Japan, which closed its borders to all foreigners until the modern period. As Ross finishes his story he asks a poignant question (it is still very much a question today): "The real issue, it would seem, is why the Riccian vision was rejected by the church. Was it in the end because Western Christianity was so inextricably linked to European culture that it could not shake itself free from the identification of Christianity with European culture with no remainder?"

Ross's book (marred, in places, by misprints) is not only an elegant history but a cautionary tale. Anyone who takes seriously Karl Rahner's famous observation that we are now becoming a *Weltkirche* (world church) will read it not only as a record of our fascinating past but as a meditation on our present situation.

Ricci and his fellow Jesuits in China focused their attention on Confucianism; they had little appreciation for the Buddhism they encountered in the East which they saw, simply, as idol worship. That is surely not the case today where the interest in Buddhism is high and dialogue with their tradition vigorous. It is fitting, then, that Ricci's dismissal of Buddhism should be redressed in such a respectful way by contemporary Jesuits. □

Lawrence S. Cunningham *teaches theology at the University of Notre Dame.*

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

Honorius defended

In his column on "Gender and the Priesthood" [January 26], John Garvey refers to Lord Acton's conclusion that Pope Honorius, speaking from the chair of Peter, proclaimed that monothelitism [the doctrine that Christ had a single divine nature] was true. I wonder what your columnist would say about the opinion of another Catholic historian, Warren H. Carroll. In his *The Building of Christendom*, vol. 2, pp. 223-4 and 250-4, Dr. Carroll makes a case, supported by Pope Leo about fifty-six years after the supposed papal heresy, that Honorius didn't proclaim monothelitism to be true but rather neglected to deal with it by asking both sides not to use certain phrases. It seems risky to base an argument on one event in a slimly documented period of history. I am personally impressed by the overall record of consistency on the part of Peter's successors.

FRED STOVEL
Warner Robins, Ga.

The author replies:

The area of history during which the Christological controversies raged isn't all that dimly documented. In point of fact, Pope Honorius was condemned by the sixth ecumenical council: "There shall be expelled from the holy church of God and anathematized Honorius who was some time Pope of Old Rome, because of what he wrote to Sergius, that in all respects he followed his view and confirmed his impious doctrine."

I do not know which statement of Pope Leo II is referred to by Dr. Carroll, but Leo did list the founders of monothelitism and went on to say: "And along with them Honorius of Rome, who consented to the pollution of the unpolluted rule of the apostolic tradition which he received from his predecessors." This, according to Jaroslav Pelikan (*The Spirit of Eastern Christendom*, Chicago 1974, p. 152). Pelikan goes on to say that this is in the Latin rescension; the Greek is more moderate, saying, "having yielded" rather than "consented," which would conform to a letter in which Honorius was blamed for "not extinguishing the flame of heretical dogma from its conception, *as was the duty of apostolic authority*, but fostering it by his negligence" [my emphasis]. Perhaps this statement is what Mr. Stovel has in

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mind. But Pelikan goes on to say that in the West, as late as the ninth and eleventh centuries, Honorius was listed among the monothelite heretics.

I agree that for the most part the early popes were remarkable for their fidelity to orthodoxy. However, Pope Boniface VIII's bull *Unam sanctam* (1302), with its teaching that only those in visible, obvious communion with the Roman See can be saved—something declared by a pope, as pope, in a matter of faith and morals—upholds the later rejected doctrine of the excommunicated Father Feeney. It doesn't begin or end with Honorius. There really is something wrong here, and with the mentality behind the idea of papal infallibility.

JOHN GARVEY

No good from evil

Richard Alleva ends his thoughtful review of *Dead Man Walking* [February 23] with a question: "Can the killing contraptions of the state be, in some cases, the gateway to salvation?" My answer: No! This is dangerous, romantic philosophizing! If God turns the horrific evil of state execution to good (in the film, Matthew Poncelet's repentance and salvation), God does not therefore excuse that evil. We deceive ourselves if we think that in perpetuating violence by killing the violent, we are somehow doing God's will, helping God make things right, or doing the victim some good.

Alleva's argument showed up in much cruder form in a letter published in the Chicago archdiocesan newspaper. The writer argued that Catholics opposed to the death penalty are heretics who do not believe in life after death, for, if they did so believe, they wouldn't think that putting a criminal to death was all that bad. As distasteful as execution may seem, we ought to bear up and do our duty, send this villain to the judgment seat of God, and trust in divine mercy. Hell, we're actually doing the poor soul a favor.

Such thinking is as hollow here as it is when children are told by parents before a spanking, "This is going to hurt me more than it will hurt you." It simply isn't so. In the case of the death penalty, it is dead wrong.

DAVID PHILIPPART
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EVANGELICAL CINEMA

Tom Musbach

After watching the film *Dead Man Walking*, I felt deeply encouraged and excited. My reaction was rare, to be sure: viewers are avoiding the film, despite critics' raves and enthusiastic thumbs up. The death penalty is not an uplifting subject, nor is execution the model happy ending. Nevertheless, the film presents a gritty look at one person reaching out to another in Christian love, a stirring snapshot of faith in action.

Based on the experiences of Sister Helen Prejean, the movie stars Susan Sarandon as a nun who befriends a death-row convict, portrayed by Sean Penn. The inmate, Matthew, is condemned to die for his role in the rape and killing of a young woman and her boyfriend. His character is despicable and unrepentant, and many of the Louisiana locals look forward to his execution. When Sister Helen visits him for the first time, Matthew insults her, but she insists on being treated with dignity. Her demand stakes out the film's high moral ground, and it wins Matthew's respect.

When she accepts the convict's request to become his spiritual advisor for the last week of his life, the prison chaplain, a Catholic priest, insists that she "save" Matthew by getting him to accept the sacraments. Her mission, according to the chaplain, does not involve getting to know the convict. Such a prescription seems too formulaic for her, however—it merely treats the prisoner like a child who must jump through the appropriate hoops in order to get a prize. Sister Helen makes it her goal to have Matthew encounter the love of Christ.

The nun is not disrespectful of the institutional church, she merely believes that a person must come before a program. Jesus met sinners where they were—in the marketplace, in the fields, in their homes. He did not insist that they meet him in the synagogue after saying the right prayers, eating the right foods, and completing the right temple rituals. Christ's love and attention made sinners feel valued as humans, even when others considered those same folks outcasts. Through the course of *Dead Man Walking* we see Sister Helen having the same effect on Matthew.

She has no timidity about preaching the gospel, make no mistake. She brings Matthew a Bible, encourages him to read it, and talks freely about Jesus. Her message is not preachy; it seems natural, given the circumstances, for her to talk about God's mercy and the power in Christ's death and Resurrection.

Matthew, however, is not a receptive audience; nothing in his behavior on death row says, "Have mercy on me, a sinner." As his spiritual advisor, Sister Helen can only prepare him for death. She painstakingly reviews with him his crime, intent on getting him to take responsibility for his actions.

During these scenes, the audience collectively flinches as Matthew recounts, and the camera replays, details of the gruesome murders and rape. The details repulse Sister Helen, too, but she hangs in there. She reminds him of Christ's words—"The truth will set you free"—and encourages him to continue examining his actions at the crime scene.

Eventually the memory overwhelms him, and his wrenching emotional breakdown represents the essence of confession. He still must die, according to the law of the land, but accepting the responsibility and the horrible truth of his crimes has freed him. His liberation is a genuine matter of the heart, a quiet event witnessed only by the patient nun.

In the film's final moments, Sister Helen demonstrates the radical nature of Christ's compassion toward sinners and societal pariahs. While accompanying Matthew to the death chamber, she urges him to look at her as he receives the lethal injection because she wants him to see "the face of love." Sitting in the witness chamber, the victims' families coldly glare at Matthew while the injection takes effect. But Sister Helen leans forward with an outstretched arm, reaching across the chasm of human judgment, her expression imploring him to remember that he's not alone. The contrast is masterful, the effect stunning.

Dead Man Walking conveys a message that is prolife in the best sense. Rather than show rallies decrying the death penalty, the film focuses on the dignity of a human being, a criminal whom most of us would have no problem dismissing. His crimes are not ignored, and the dramatic last-minute request for an appeal is denied. The compassion of Jesus for all people, exemplified by Sister Helen, is the triumphant energy that drives the film. It's about a great deal more than the death penalty. Jesus modeled respect for all humans as a way of life, not as a political statement.

Dead Man Walking is not the "feel-good movie of 1995," but its intelligent portrayal of one nun's compassion made me feel good about being a Catholic. It's the best unintentionally evangelistic film I've seen in years—an endorsement you won't hear from Siskel and Ebert anytime soon. □

Tom Musbach *is a writer and editor living in San Francisco.*

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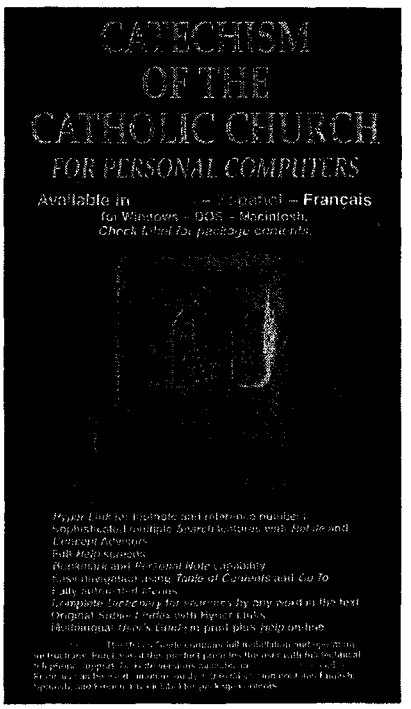

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